A REVIEW

OF

MR. WILBERFORCE'S TREATISE,

ENTITLED

A PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE PREVAILING RELIGIOUS SYSTEM OF PROFESSED CHRISTIANS, &c.

IN

LETTERS TO A LADY.

By THOMAS BELSHAM.

Leſt your minds ſhould be corrupted, from the ſimplicity that is in Chriſt. PAUL.

Chriſtianity can never have its free courſe among men of improved underſtandings, and even among rational creatures in general, while groſs miſrepreſentations of it, are ſubſtituted in the place of the ſimple and perfect Original.

ARCHBISHOP NEWCOME.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, NO. 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1798.

BRITISH MUSEUM

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A REVIEW

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OF

MR. WILBERFORCE'S TREATISE, &c.

LETTER I.

Mr. Wilberforce's Syſtem ſtated.

MADAM,

THE taſk you were pleaſed to aſſign me of making ſome remarks upon Mr. Wilberforce's late publication, entitled, A Practical View of the prevailing religious Syſtem of profeſſed Chriſtians, &c. though undertaken with ſome reluctance, has, in the execution, been productive of a conſiderable degree of pleaſure and advantage. It has induced me to review, and to compare with greater attention than I ſhould otherwiſe have done, the religious ſyſtem which Mr. Wilberforce maintains, and which was by education my own, with that which I

have embraced upon rational conviction in conſequence of ſerious enquiry; the reſult of which compariſon has been a growing ſatisfaction in the latter, both with regard to its ſpeculative truth, and its practical ſuperiority.

Mr. Wilberforce is pleaſed to dignify the principles which he defends, or rather aſſumes, throughout his work, with the high epithet of "the peculiar doctrines of "the goſpel," p. 69, and hardly allows the name of chriſtian to thoſe who call in queſtion his unproved dogmas concerning what he ſtiles, p. 320, "the corruption of human "nature, the atonement of the Saviour, and "the ſanctifying influence of the holy ſpirit." But as in the preſent inquiſitive and enlightened age confident aſſertions no longer paſs for ſelf-evident truths, I ſhall take the liberty of examining freely into the merits of theſe opinions which ſo unworthily uſurp the name of goſpel doctrines, almoſt to the excluſion, certainly to the neglect of the genuine doctrine of Chriſt; and I hope to prove to your ſatisfaction, that, ſo far from making good their claims, they are inconſiſtent

ſiſtent with reaſon, unfounded in ſcripture, and injurious to morality.

It is not eaſy to make out from Mr. Wilberforce's book the preciſe nature of the peculiar doctrines, the belief of which is repreſented as eſſential to the character of a chriſtian. As Mr. Wilberforce makes light of the ſcience of metaphyſics*, which teaches us to think juſtly, and to expreſs ourſelves accurately upon intellectual ſubjects, it is not ſurpriſing that he has neglected to give a definition or a clear explanation of the doctrines which he ſo ſtrongly inculcates, and that he has left his readers to collect them as they are able, from hints incidentally thrown out in different parts of his work. Indeed I ſtrongly ſuſpect that his own ideas of theſe vaunted doctrines are very obſcure and confuſed; and that he would find it difficult to expreſs in intelligible language the ſyſtem which he affirms it to be neceſſary that all ſhould believe.

Upon the ſubject of what he calls the corruption of human nature, Mr. Wilberforce is indeed ſufficiently explicit. "Man

* Practical View, p. 102.

(ſays he, p. 26,) "is an apoſtate creature— "tainted with ſin, not ſlightly and ſuperfici- "ally, but radically, and to the very core." This it ſeems is Mr. Wilberforce's idea of the ſtate in which the Creator of the world places and leaves the great maſs of his human offspring,—and the evidence of this fact he repreſents as ſo "irreſiſtibly "ſtrong, that none but the *obſtinately dull*, "(p. 51) can fail to diſcern its force." And as if it were not ſufficient for men to be "naturally in a ſtate in which they are un- "able to will or to do rightly," he further teaches us, that in this helpleſs ſtate we are left by our Creator "to contend with an evil "ſpirit, (p. 42) whoſe dominion is ſo general "as to entitle him to the denomination of "the prince of this world."

Mr. Wilberforce makes no heſitation in conſigning to eternal miſery all thoſe who fail in this unequal conteſt, that is, the great majority of the human race, and even of profeſſed chriſtians. All indeed who are not extricated from this wretched and helpleſs ſtate by the ſupernatural aid of the holy ſpirit. "This indeed, he ſays, (p. 50,) is of-

"fered

" fered to us, and we are furniſhed with every " help ;" but theſe offers are of no uſe unleſs to inſult and aggravate our miſery, ſince we are " naturally unable even to will what is " right ;" and therefore unable to accept or deſire any aſsiſtance or deliverance. " Of " ourſelves we are told, p. 113, we can " do nothing, we are by nature children " of wrath, and under the power of the " evil ſpirit. It is the influence of the " holy ſpirit which *originally* awakens us " from ſlumber, and quickens us when " dead." Language has no meaning if Mr. Wilberforce's words do not expreſs the dreadful doctrine that the Creator of the univerſe has placed the majority of his human offspring in circumſtances the inevitable conſequence of which is their eternal miſery, for want of thoſe influences of the holy ſpirit which they cannot ſolicit or deſire, and which he will not otherwiſe impart. Such are the ſtrange opinions which Mr. Wilberforce preſumes to call the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel, the belief of which is eſſential to the character of a chriſtian, and which he repreſents, p. 330, " as warming

" the hearts of the people of God on earth
" with continual admiration, and thankful-
" neſs, and love, and joy, and as calling
" forth afreſh in heaven the ardent effuſions
" of their inexhauſted gratitude."

Upon the ſubject of the atonement, which, together with the corruption of human nature, and the influences of the holy ſpirit, conſtitutes Mr. Wilberforce's ſyſtem of peculiar doctrines, as this gentleman has declined to explain his ideas, it is impoſsible to know what hypotheſis he means to patroniſe. There are three explanations of the doctrine, one or other of which is uſually adopted by perſons who chuſe to annex ideas to the language they uſe. The firſt is the Calviniſtic ſcheme, which teaches that Chriſt, being equal with the Father, ſuffered either in the garden, on the croſs, or in hell, in quantity or in value, all that the elect would have ſuffered if they had not been ſo redeemed. Divine juſtice required its victim either in the ſinner or his ſubſtitute: Jeſus became the ſurety; he paid the debt and ſatisfied the demand. The ſecond may be called the Arminian

ſcheme;

ſcheme; it ſuppoſes that the ſufferings of Jeſus were inconceivably ſevere; and that the object of them was to exhibit the evil and demerit of ſin, and the diſpleaſure of God againſt it, who would not forgive even a ſincere penitent without thus manifeſting his hatred of wickedneſs. This I conceive to be what is now called the moderate doctrine. The third hypotheſis is that of the learned Dr. John Taylor *, who ſuppoſes that the ſcriptures repreſent the death of Jeſus as an act of obedience ſo acceptable to God, that as the reward of it, he raiſes all mankind from the grave, and places them in circumſtances of moral advantage equal to that of Adam antecedent to the fall. Whether Mr. Wilberforce embraces any one of theſe hypotheſes, or has any other of his own, or whether he uſes his words vaguely and without any ſettled meaning, does not appear. He contents himſelf with general expreſsions, ſuch, for inſtance, as "that chriſtianity is a ſcheme "for juſtifying the ungodly by Chriſt's dying "for them when yet ſinners," (p. 121) a pro-

* Key to the Romans.

poſition to which no doubt all chriſtians will give a verbal aſſent, though their ideas may be widely diſſonant from each other. He afterwards dilates upon "the benefits of "Chriſt's ſatisfaction," p. 123; "upon the "deep feeling of gratitude for the merits and "interceſsion of Chriſt, to which we are "wholly indebted for our reconciliation to "God, and for the will and power from firſt "to laſt of working out our ſalvation," ib. He recommends "exhorting men to throw "themſelves with deep proſtration of ſoul at "the foot of the croſs," p. 124; and inſiſts on "dependence upon our bleſſed Saviour as "the alone meritorious cauſe of our ac-"ceptance with God," p. 127.

As far therefore as I am able to collect Mr. Wilberforce's opinion, it ſeems to be, that the Creator doth not extricate any of his creatures from the wretched condition in which he places them by nature, out of pure diſintereſted benevolence, but out of regard to the tranſcendent merit of another divine Being, who, by his ſufferings made ſatisfaction to the Creator; to whom therefore, as Mr. Wilberforce juſtly obſerves, we

are

are *wholly* indebted for our reconciliation with God.

You will not think, Madam, that I have undertaken a very difficult taſk in profeſsing to point out the inconſiſtency of ſuch extravagant opinions with ſound reaſon, with genuine chriſtianity, and with good morals.

I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

Remarks on Mr. Wilberforce's Syſtem of View of rational Religion.

MADAM,

THOUGH it was my deſign in the preceding letter to exhibit an exact, and not a caricature portrait of Mr. Wilberforce's ſyſtem, and though I have faithfully and cloſely copied from his original, I ſtrongly ſuſpect that this gentleman if he ſhould caſt his eye upon it, would deny the reſemblance, and would think it impoſsible that he ſhould patroniſe a theory, the prominent features of which are ſo odious and diſguſting. The truth is that Mr. Wilberforce and others who agree with him ſeldom regard their ſyſtem in a comprehenſive view, or purſue their principles to their juſt and neceſſary conſequences. Satisfied with being themſelves in the number of the elect and regenerate, they ſee no cauſe to complain on their own account, and giving themſelves up to joy and gratitude

titude for their perſonal intereſt in the promiſes of the goſpel, they feel little concern for the non-elect maſs of mankind, doomed by the neceſsity of their circumſtances to eternal miſery, and ſeldom allow themſelves to enquire how far ſuch a ſtate of things is reconcilable to wiſdom, benevolence, or juſtice.

The natural and neceſſary conſequences of principles are the ſame whether the advocates of ſuch principles are apprized of them or not, and whether they do or do not chuſe to contemplate and avow them.

It is from the abſurd and injurious conſequences which neceſſarily reſult from Mr. Wilberforce's principles that I infer their falſhood, and impiety; and I am confident that if Mr. Wilberforce ſaw them in the ſame light in which they appear to me, his love of truth and virtue would lead him to reject them with equal abhorrence.

I ſhall now proceed to exhibit a conciſe view of rational chriſtianity in its connexion with natural religion.

Of

Of rational religion, the firſt and fundamental principle is, that the Maker of the univerſe is infinitely powerful, wiſe, and good, and that it is impoſsible for him to act in contradiction to his eſſential attributes.

God is love. Infinite benevolence *alone* prompted him to action. And infinite benevolence, combined with unerring wiſdom, and ſupported by irreſiſtible power, will infallibly accompliſh its purpoſe in the beſt poſsible manner. It appears in fact, that a limited quantity of evil, both natural and moral, was neceſſary to the production of the greateſt poſsible good. Whence this neceſsity ariſes we know not; but that it could not be avoided in a ſyſtem upon the whole the beſt we are well aſſured; for God would not chuſe evil for its own ſake. Evil therefore is introduced and permitted, not becauſe it is *approved*, but becauſe it is *unavoidable.* It is in its own nature temporary and ſelf-deſtructive; and in the view of the Deity it is abſorbed and loſt in the contemplation of its ultimate beneficial effects, ſo that to Him the whole ſyſtem appears wiſe, beautiful, and good.

God

God is the Former, the Father, and Benefactor of the human race, whom for wiſe reaſons, unknown to us, but perfectly conſiſtent, no doubt, with his magnificent plan of univerſal order and happineſs, he has been pleaſed to place in circumſtances of frailty and danger, the natural conſequence of which, in their progreſs through life, is the contraction of a certain degree of moral pollution, which, in the nature of things, and by the divine appointment, expoſes them to a proportionate degree of miſery, here or hereafter.

But this fact by no means proves a preponderance of vice and miſery in the world; otherwiſe we muſt conclude that the Maker of the world, whoſe character we learn only from his works, is a weak or a malignant Being. The truth is, that although the quantity of vice and miſery actually exiſting is very conſiderable, there is nevertheleſs upon the whole a very great preponedrance of good in general, and with few, if any exceptions, in every individual in particular.

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The almoſt univerſal deſire of life and dread of diſſolution, amounts to a ſtrong preſumption, that life is in general a bleſſing. And the diſgrace univerſally attached to flagrant vice, proves that ſuch vice is not common. Character is the ſum total of moral and intellectual habits, and the proportion of virtuous habits, in the worſt characters exceeds that of vicious ones. But no character takes the denomination of virtuous unleſs *all* the habits are on the ſide of virtue: whereas *one* evil habit is ſufficient to ſtamp a character vicious.

God cannot be unjuſt to any of his creatures. Having brought men into exiſtence and placed them in circumſtances of imminent peril, though in the nature of things miſery is neceſſarily connected with vice, we may certainly conclude that none of the creatures of God in *ſuch* or in any circumſtances will ever be made *eternally miſerable.* Indeed it is plainly repugnant to the juſtice of God, that the gift of exiſtence to any of his intelligent creatures, ſhould be upon the whole a curſe.

The light of philoſophy affords a few plauſible arguments for the doctrine of a future life: there are ſome appearances phyſical and moral, which cannot be ſatisfactorily explained upon any other ſuppoſition. But ſince the ſentient powers are ſuſpended by death, and admit of no revival but by the revival of the man, a fact the expectation of which is entirely unſupported both by experience and analogy, the ſpeculations of philoſophy would neceſſarily terminate in the diſbelief of a future exiſtence.

Here divine revelation offers its ſeaſonable and welcome aid, God has commiſſioned his faithful and holy ſervant, Jeſus of Nazareth, to teach the univerſal reſurrection of the dead, and by his own reſurrection to confirm and exemplify his doctrine.

Jeſus hath authoritatively taught, that the wicked will be raiſed to ſuffering; nor could it poſsibly be otherwiſe, if they are to be raiſed with the ſame ſyſtem of habits and feelings with which they deſcended to the grave, and without which their identity would be loſt. But ſince eternal miſery for temporary

porary crimes is inconſiſtent with every principle of juſtice, and ſince a reſurrection from previous inſenſibility to indefinite miſery, to be ſucceeded by abſolute annihilation, is a harſh ſuppoſition, contrary to all analogy, and not to be admitted but upon the cleareſt evidence, we are naturally led to conclude that the ſufferings of the wicked will be remedial, and that they will terminate in a complete purification from moral diſorder, and in their ultimate reſtoration to virtue and happineſs. In this concluſion we ſeem to be juſtified by thoſe paſſages in the apoſtolical writings which declare, that the bleſsings of the goſpel ſhall be far more extenſive than the calamities of the fall *, and that Chriſt ſhall reign till all things ſhall be ſubdued unto him †.

The apoſtles were commanded to preach the goſpel to the idolatrous heathen as well as to the choſen family of Abraham, and they were authorized to confirm their doctrine by miracles. Theſe extraordinary powers are in the ſcriptures called the ſpirit of God, and

* Rom. v. † 1 Cor. xv.

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the holy ſpirit; and the great change which took place in the views, feelings, and character of phariſaic jews and idolatrous heathen, when they ſincerely profeſſed the chriſtian faith, is called, a *new creation, regeneration, riſing from the dead*, and the like. And as converſion to chriſtianity was uſually produced by the evidence of miracles, this new creation, regeneration, ſanctification, or paſsing from death to life, is in this ſenſe aſcribed to the ſpirit of God.

The jews, having been choſen by God to peculiar privileges, entertained a very high notion of their own dignity, and expreſſed themſelves in the moſt contemptuous language of the idolatrous gentiles, who were not in covenant with Jehovah. Of themſelves they ſpoke as a *choſen and a holy nation, ſons of God, and heirs of the promiſes.* But the heathens were repreſented as *ſinners, as aliens, as enemies to God*, and the like. In alluſion to which forms of expreſſion the converted gentiles being entitled equally with converted jews, to the bleſſings of the new diſpenſation, they are therefore ſaid to be *forgiven, reconciled,*

and ſaved, to be *fellow citizens* with the ſaints, and of the houſhold of God.

The death of Jeſus is ſometimes called a *propitiation*, becauſe it put an end to the moſaic œconomy, and introduced a new and more liberal diſpenſation, under which the gentiles, who were before regarded as enemies, are admitted into a ſtate of amity and reconciliation; that is, into a ſtate of privilege ſimilar to that of the jews. It is alſo occaſionally called a *ſacrifice*, having been the ſeal of that new covenant into which God is pleaſed to enter with his human offſpring, by which a reſurrection to immortal life and happineſs is promiſed, without diſtinction, to all who are truly virtuous. Bclievers in Chriſt are alſo ſaid to have *redemption through his blood*, becauſe they are releaſed by the chriſtian covenant from the yoke of the ceremonial law, and from the bondage of idolatry. Dr. Taylor has in general well explained theſe jewiſh phraſes in his admirable *Key* to the apoſtolic writings prefixed to his commentary on the epiſtle to the Romans.

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The ſcriptures contain a faithful and credible account of the *chriſtian doctrine* which is the *true word of God:* but they are not *themſelves* the word of God, nor do they ever aſſume that title: and it is highly improper to ſpeak of them as ſuch, as it leads inattentive readers to ſuppoſe they were written under a plenary inſpiration to which they make no pretenſion, and as ſuch expreſsions expoſe chriſtianity unneceſſarily to the cavils of unbelievers. Mr. W. and many others, are accuſtomed to quote texts as diſtinct inſpired aphoriſms, without regard to the connexion in which they ſtand, and often, for want of critical attention to the ſcriptures, in a ſenſe contrary to their true meaning. In the courſe of theſe ſtrictures I ſhall have occaſion to notice many inſtances of this nature.

Chriſtianity ſums up the whole of human duty in the love of God and our neighbour: and requiring that *all* our time ſhould be employed to the beſt account, and that every action ſhould be conſecrated to God, lays no ſtreſs upon ritual

obſervations, and expreſsly aboliſhes that diſtinction of days which formed ſo conſpicuous a feature in the moſaic inſtitute. To a true chriſtian, every day is a ſabbath, every place is a temple, and every action of life an act of devotion. A chriſtian is not required to be more holy, nor permitted to take greater liberties upon one day than upon another. Whatever is lawful or expedient upon any one day of the week is, under the chriſtian diſpenſation, equally lawful and expedient on any other day. Public worſhip, however, muſt be conducted at ſtated intervals, and it has been uſual from the earlieſt times for chriſtians to aſſemble together, on the firſt day of the week, to commemorate the death, and to celebrate the reſurrection of their Maſter.

This appears to me to be the true doctrine of reaſon and revelation, in which the God of nature is not repreſented as frowning over his works, and like a mercileſs tyrant dooming his helpleſs creatures to eternal miſery, with the arbitrary exception of a choſen few, but as the wiſe, benevolent, and impartial parent of his rational off-

offspring, who is training them all under various proceſſes of intellectual and moral diſcipline to perfect virtue and everlaſting felicity. Such is the God of my faith and adoration, the God of nature and of revelation, the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that God whoſe exiſtence, attributes, and government are the joy and confidence of every enlightened and virtuous believer.

Which of the two ſyſtems, delineated above, is moſt agreable to reaſon and revelation, and beſt adapted to encourage virtue, and to produce rational tranquillity of mind, muſt be left to the judgment of thoſe who will take the trouble to examine and compare them.

I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER III.

Obſervations upon the ſuppoſed inadequate Conceptions generally entertained of the Importance of Chriſtianity. Compariſon between the reſpect ſhewn to the ſcriptures by popular interpreters, and by rational chriſtians.

MADAM,

I Now proceed in purſuance of my deſign to review Mr. Wilberforce's Treatiſe, and as it will beſt anſwer my purpoſe to adhere to the author's own method, I hope you will have the goodneſs to excuſe a few occaſional repetitions which upon this plan are almoſt unavoidable.

He begins (p. 7.) with "pointing out "the very inadequate conceptions which "the bulk of profeſſed chriſtians entertain "of chriſtianity, and complains that their "homage is intended to be paid not to "chriſtianity in particular, but at beſt to "religion in general, perhaps to mere "morality. With chriſtianity as diſtinct "from theſe they are little acquainted."

I like

I like not this diſtinction between chriſtianity, and religious morality, from which it is inſeparable, and from its tendency to encourage which it derives all its value. This cold and ſupercilious manner of ſpeaking of religion and morality, is liable to be miſapprehended, and tends to generate indifference towards religious and moral practice. Mr. W. I am perſuaded, has no ſuch intention, but his expreſsions ſhould have been more guarded.

By chriſtianity as diſtinct from religion and mere morality, Mr. W. probably means the *doctrines* of the chriſtian religion, (p. 8.) "There are, ſays he, ſome "few facts, and perhaps ſome leading doc- "trines and principles of which they cannot "be wholly ignorant, but of the conſe- "quences and relations, and practical uſes "of theſe they have few ideas, or none at "all."

I ſhall not now ſtay to enquire what the *conſequences, relations and practical uſes* of chriſtian doctrines and principles are as *diſtinct* from religion and morality, but only obſerve, that if Mr. W. means to affirm

that men profeſsing chriſtianity are in general ignorant of its fundamental principles, he is greatly miſtaken. Theſe are obvious to the meaneſt capacity, and no perſon who is capable of reading the ſcriptures can doubt that the chief doctrine of Chriſt and his apoſtles is, that the virtuous ſhall riſe to happineſs, and the vicious to ſuffering, how little ſoever their conduct may be governed by a regard to theſe important principles. But if he means by chriſtianity what he is pleaſed to call its *peculiar* doctrines, ſuch as original depravity, atonement, and the like, which conſtitute no part of the chriſtianity of the new teſtament, it is not much to be regretted, that chriſtians are either totally ignorant of theſe doctrines, or that profeſsing to believe them they pay little practical attention to them.

Every friend to religion will lament with Mr. W. (p. 8.) "That the chil-
"dren of chriſtian parents, while they are
"carefully educated in all thoſe accompliſh-
"ments which belong to their ſtation in life,
"are left to collect their religion as they
"may;

" may: and that in an age wherein in-
" fidelity abounds, they take little care to
" inſtruct their children in the principles of
" the faith, which they profeſs, and to fur-
" niſh them with arguments for the defence
" of it." And it is highly probable that much of the infidelity of the age may be traced to this ſource.

Mr. W. in the following pages deſcribes the little practical regard which profeſſed chriſtians in general pay to their principles, and the great inferiority of the common ſtandard of morality, to the requiſitions of the goſpel. He alſo juſtly animadverts upon the criminality of voluntary ignorance, and the extreme folly of " ex-
" pecting to be chriſtians without labour,
" ſtudy, or enquiry." (p. 15.)

" The diligent peruſal of the ſcriptures,
" it is added, would diſcover to us our
" paſt ignorance. We ſhould ceaſe to be
" deceived by ſuperficial appearances, and
" to confound the goſpel of Chriſt with
" the ſyſtems of philoſophers." Upon this ground I readily join iſſue with him, and

and deſire nothing more than that our reſpective theories may be brought to the teſt of the ſcriptures critically examined, and rightly underſtood. And here it may be proper briefly to ſtate the different methods in which the advocates for popular ſyſtems, and the friends of rational chriſtianity, expreſs the veneration which both profeſs for the writings of the apoſtles, and evangeliſts. This is the more neceſſary, as rational chriſtians are often accuſed of not paying due reſpect to the authority of the ſcriptures.

Popular writers teſtify their regard for the ſcriptures, by aſſerting or aſſuming their plenary inſpiration—by calling them indiſcriminately the word of God—by quoting text upon text without regard to connection, without proper explanation, without any allowance for figurative language, or jewiſh phraſeology, and without any attempt to aſcertain the genuineneſs of diſputed paſſages; citing detached ſentences, as inſpired apophthegms, relying with full confidence on the received text, as though the autho-

authority of its editors* were equal to that of the apoſtles, and apparently ignorant of all that has been accompliſhed by the indefatigable induſtry, and penetrating ſagacity of modern critics†, to correct the text and to bring it nearer to the original ſtandard; equally confiding in the authority of the Engliſh tranſlation; and annexing without heſitation or enquiry thoſe ſenſes to diſputed phraſes which have been learned from obſolete articles and creeds, the product of an age juſt emerging from barbariſm, when neither the language nor the doctrines of the ſcripture were well underſtood. This, in the eſtimation of many, is paying due honour to the chriſtian ſcriptures.

But the men who in my judgment ſhew the trueſt reſpect to the New Teſtament, are thoſe who regard the ſacred writers

* Erasmus, Robert Stephens, and Beza, who publiſhed editions of the Greek Teſtament from manuſcripts in their poſſeſſion, in the 16th century; ſince which time little alteration has been made in the received text.

† Upwards of three hundred manuſcripts have been collated ſince the 16th century, by which the received text might be in many places materially corrected.

as capable and faithful witneſſes both of the doctrine which Jeſus taught, and of the facts which they relate—who not forward to admit of any deviation from the laws of nature where the neceſsity is not obvious, allow the inſpiration of the writers of the New Teſtament in no caſes where they do not themſelves expreſsly claim it, and who are not ſparing of the labour neceſſary to diſtinguiſh even in the canonical books, what is of divine authority, from that which is of human origin—who believe that the evangelical and apoſtolic writings contain a complete and authentic account of the doctrine and religion of Jeſus—who ſhew their veneration for the ſcriptures, not by taking every thing upon truſt, but by a diligent enquiry into the genuineneſs of every book, admitting no one into their canon which cannot ſatisfactorily prove its title to apoſtolic origin—who do not haſtily allow the infallibility of the received text of thoſe books, whoſe general authority is acknowledged—who think that the editors of the ſixteenth century, however honeſt, diligent and ſagacious,

were

were equally liable to miſapprehenſion and prejudice with later publiſhers of the ſacred text, and have no paramount claim to infallibility—who conceiving that many new ſources of information have been opened in the two laſt centuries, and that much has been done to correct and improve the received text, will admit no paſſage as genuine which has found its way into the common editions of the ſcriptures, in oppoſition to the moſt approved manuſcripts, the moſt ancient and uncorrupted verſions, and the united teſtimonies of the earlieſt chriſtian writers—who having thus obtained a text approximating as nearly as poſsible to original purity, diligently ſtudy the true meaning of oriental imagery, and of jewiſh idioms and phraſes,—who paying little deference to tranſlations by authority, or to ſenſes arbitrarily annexed to the apoſtolic language by the prejudiced compilers of catechiſms and creeds, follow the great example of Locke in ſtudying the ſcriptures themſelves, and in making them their own interpreters; reading them over repeatedly with due attention to diſcover the meaning of the author, and the

ſcope

ſcope of his argument—comparing together ſimilar paſſages, illuſtrating the New Teſtament by the Old, and paſſages brief, enigmatical, and obſcure, by thoſe which are copious, clear, and intelligible; thus extricating the genuine ſenſe, without taking into conſideration whether it agrees with this or is repugnant to that hypotheſis of vain and ignorant men, who ſtrain the apoſtolic language to the ſupport of their favourite ſyſtems.

This is the way in which rational critics ſhew their attachment to the chriſtian ſcriptures. Whether this judicious homage of men of learning and enquiry, or the blind reſpect of popular interpreters be moſt honourable to that ſacred and ineſtimable volume, and moſt worthy the imitation of thoſe who aſpire to the high diſtinction of enlightened and conſiſtent chriſtians, let candour and good ſenſe determine.

I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Concerning the ſuppoſed Corruption of Human Nature.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce having diſcuſſed the defective notions which he ſuppoſes the bulk of profeſſed chriſtians to entertain of the importance of chriſtianity in general, deſcends, (c. 2.) to animadvert upon what he deems to be particular miſconceptions of its doctrines; and begins (ſect. 1.) with "the corruption and weakneſs of human "nature," upon which he aſſumes a tone of confidence proportioned, I had almoſt ſaid, to the defect of evidence.

Let us, in entering upon this enquiry, ſet out upon right principles, and look ſteadily forward to direct and neceſſary conſequences. It will at leaſt make us circumſpect in examining facts, and cautious in admitting concluſions. I aſſume it as an axiom which needs no proof, that, "whatever we

"are

" are by nature, we are what our Creator " made us *." Alſo that we have no ſatisfactory rule of judging of the character of the Deity, but from his operations. If in the works of God there is a preponderance of good, both natural and moral, and a continually increaſing tendency to ultimate and infinite good, the Creator of the univerſe is infinitely benevolent. But the melancholy reverſe of this is true, if there be a preponderance of evil. If indeed the fact, after impartial and diligent enquiry appears to be ſuch, we muſt acquieſce in what we are not able to remedy. But that the Governor of the univerſe is a malignant Being, is a doctrine ſo diſtreſsing, and to which a well-diſpoſed mind is ſo averſe, that nothing but the moſt irreſiſtible evidence will ever make it credible.

It is futile to allege, as a palliation of the difficulty, that the firſt parents of the human race were originally innocent and happy; but that, in conſequence of their fall,

* Practical View, p. 53.

they

they contracted a depraved nature which they tranſmitted to their poſterity, for which God is not accountable. Such reaſoning as this cannot impoſe upon the underſtanding even of a child. Did God reſign the direction of his works as ſoon as he had placed Adam in paradiſe? Is not his agency as really and as immediately concerned in the formation of every individual of mankind, as in that of their original anceſtor? If I am born into the world a depraved creature, it is by his appointment, and even by his immediate energy. "I am what my Crea-" tor made me."

It is, if poſsible, ſtill more prepoſterous to argue, that although evil prevails in this diſtrict of the univerſe, good may greatly preponderate upon the whole. This is nothing more than an appeal from fact to gratuitous ſuppoſition. We can only reaſon from what we know. If evil prevails as far as our obſervation extends, we can have no reaſon to believe that it does not prevail in the ſame proportion through the univerſe. Revelation itſelf could not prove the con-

 trary;

trary; for if God be a malignant Being, how can we know that he does not take pleaſure in deceiving his creatures? What ground have we for depending upon his veracity?

The queſtion before us then is not a queſtion of mere ſpeculation, it is a queſtion of fact and experience, pregnant with the moſt ſerious conſequences: it involves the moral character of the Supreme Being. Let us now enquire what view Mr. W. exhibits of the works of his Creator.

From chriſtianity, ſays Mr. W. (p. 26) "we learn that man is an apoſtate crea-" ture, fallen from his high original, de-" graded in his nature, and depraved in his " faculties, indiſpoſed to good, and diſpoſed " to evil; prone to vice, it is natural and " eaſy to him; diſinclined to virtue, it " is difficult and laborious; that he is " tainted with ſin, not ſlightly and ſuper-" ficially, but *radically, and to the very core.*"

Of the truth of theſe facts Mr. W. is ſo confident, that he thinks, (p. 27) that "if this very corruption did not " warp the judgment, none would be

" hardy

" hardy enough to attempt to controvert
" them."

After an eloquent deſcription of the natural powers of man, he proceeds (p. 28) to deſcribe his actual ſtate, and to argue the depravity of human nature from an induction of particulars. With this view he appeals to the character of the ancient heathen, and of modern ſavages. He argues from the imperfect morals of profeſsing chriſtians, from the perverſe and froward diſpoſition of children, from the pronenes of men to ſelf-deceit; from the negligence of mere profeſſors, and from the confeſsions of ſincere chriſtians. " This ſtate of facts " he affirms (p. 39) cannot be accounted " for on any other ſuppoſition than that of " ſome original taint, ſome radical prin- " ciple of corruption." Hence he triumphantly concludes, (p. 40) that " the de- " pravity of human nature is proved by the " ſame mode of reaſoning as has been " deemed concluſive in eſtabliſhing the " exiſtence, and aſcertaining the laws of " the principle of gravitation, and that the " doctrine reſts on the ſame baſis as the

" ſublime philoſophy of Newton." " Leſt " however (ſays he, p. 51) any ſhould be " ſo *obſtinately dull* as not to diſcern the " force of the evidence ſuggeſted to our " reaſon, and confirmed by all experience," revelation comes in (p. 40) and " ſuſtains " the fallible conjectures of our unaſſiſted " reaſon." And he produces a number of texts which in his judgment prove the doctrine; adding, (p. 41) " that paſſages " might be multiplied upon paſſages, which " ſpeak the ſame language; and theſe " again might be illuſtrated and confirmed at " large by various other conſiderations." So that (p. 51) " we muſt be altogether " inexcuſable if we ſtill remain unconvinced " by ſuch an accumulated maſs of argu- " ment."

Such is the account Mr. W. gives of the ſtate of man by nature, that is, as he comes out of the hands of his Maker. And he does not heſitate to repreſent this doctrine (p. 24) " as lying at the root of " all true religion, and as eminently the " baſis and ground work of chriſtianity."

" In-

"Inexcuſable" as it may appear to Mr. Wilberforce, I am not aſhamed to avow myſelf to be one of thoſe who are either ſo "*obſtinately dull*," or "whoſe judgments "are ſo warped by this very corruption," as not to be convinced by an "accumulated "maſs" of arguments which are at one time repreſented as "equivalent to the de-"monſtrations of the Newtonian philo-"ſophy," and at another ſtiled, with more propriety, "fallible conjectures," and which are feebly ſupported by an injudicious collection of unexplained and miſapplied paſſages of ſcripture. I do not ſee reaſon to believe that the wiſe and benevolent Creator has introduced into exiſtence his human offspring, "tainted to the very core with "ſin." And I heſitate not to ſay, that whoever affirms this, impeaches the character of his Maker and traduces his works. The following obſervations will, I hope, ſtate the matter in a clear and ſatisfactory light.

Character is the ſum total of habits. But in forming an eſtimate of moral worth, it is an invariable principle that *one* vice ſtamps

a character vicious, while a thouſand virtues will not atone for one immoral habit. If a man be a liar, or diſhoneſt, or intemperate, or impious, his character is denominated vicious, with whatever virtues it may otherwiſe be adorned. "He who keepeth "the whole law, and offendeth in one "point, is guilty of all." And the reaſon is evident, virtue is that ſyſtem of habits which conduces to the greateſt ultimate happineſs; vice is that which diminiſhes happineſs or produces miſery. The union therefore of a ſingle vice with a conſtellation of virtues, will contaminate them all; will prevent them from producing their proper effect, and will, in proportion as it prevails, diminiſh the happineſs, or produce the miſery of the agent, who never can attain the true end of his exiſtence till this vice is eradicated. He cannot enjoy perfect moral health till every mental diſorder is radically removed.

Hence it follows, that there may be a conſiderable preponderance of virtues even in characters juſtly eſtimated as vicious, and likewiſe that the *quantity* of virtue in the world

world may far exceed that of vice, though the *number* of virtuous characters, may be leſs than that of vicious ones.

And this is the real ſtate of things. That a very conſiderable proportion of moral evil actually exiſts, and indeed far more than we ſhould antecedently have expected under the government of God, cannot be denied: The exact ſum can never be known. But that vice upon the whole predominates over virtue, is contrary to experience: Few characters are flagrantly wicked; and perhaps, even in the worſt of men, good habits and actions are more numerous than the contrary. Certainly they are ſo in the majority of mankind. And though perfect rectitude is no where to be found, preponderant virtue is almoſt univerſal.

We hear more of the vices of men than of their virtues: and why? Becauſe virtue is the *ordinary* ſtate of things, and no notice is taken of it: vice is a deviation from the accuſtomed order, and therefore it is remarked and recorded. Children, we are told, (p. 34) "are perverſe and froward;" that is, they now and then diſcover ſuch a temper,

and every inſtance of it is noted. But of their innocence, their gentleneſs, their playfulneſs, their facility of being pleaſed, or pacified, and the like, no notice is taken, becauſe it is their uſual ſtate. The virtue of honeſty aſſumes the name of *common* from its very general prevalence, and "mere "morality" ſeems, even in Mr. W.'s eſtimation, to be a cheap commodity. How much more frequent is moderation than groſs intemperance, and veracity than falſhood? In a word, ſuch is the ſituation in which we are happily placed by Divine Providence, that although in the beſt characters ſome imperfection exiſts, and in the majority of mankind more than one vice prevails, yet a preponderance of virtue is, with very few exceptions, generated in all.

Mr. W. will hardly maintain what ſome have ſtrangely aſſerted, that all actions and habits previous to converſion, are ſinful. The refutation of ſuch an abſurdity would be an abuſe of argument.

The exiſtence of evil in the degree in which it prevails, "cannot be accounted

"for

"for according to Mr. W. (p. 39) on "any other ſuppoſition than that of "ſome original taint, ſome radical prin- "ciple of corruption." The only enquiry of importance upon this ſubject, is into the quantity and proportion of the evil which actually exiſts. How it was firſt introduced is a queſtion comparatively of little moment. The difficulty is the ſame upon all hypotheſes. All muſt ultimately be referred to God. "He made light and "created darkneſs, he made peace and "created evil." My controverſy with Mr. W. is not about the origin of evil, but the degree and deſign of it. With regard to the former queſtion, though it may be allowed that in ſome inſtances children ſeem to inherit the vices as well as the diſeaſes of their parents; yet in general it appears moſt probable, that as men are the creatures of circumſtances, the habits they form, whether good or bad, are the reſult of the impreſsions to which they are expoſed.

All vice muſt ſuffer its proper puniſhment, that is, moral evil muſt be expelled by

by the application of natural evil; and if the diſcipline of the preſent life is not adequate to this end, the proceſs muſt be carried on by the ſeverer ſufferings of a future retribution. This is indeed an alarming conſideration, even to men of the beſt characters, for there are very few who have attained that perfection of virtue which will exempt them from all painful apprehenſions with regard to their future ſtate of being. "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way "that leads to life, and few there be that "find it." But on the contrary, the preponderance of virtuous affections, even in characters contaminated with groſs vice, affords a pleaſing preſumption, that whatever intermediate ſcene of ſuffering may await the offender, virtue will ultimately triumph, and that all the rational creatures of God will in the end be perfectly holy and happy.

Mr. W's arguments from ſcripture in favour of the corruption of human nature, are as little to the purpoſe as his appeal to facts, and afford a curious ſpecimen of his looſe and injudicious mode of reaſon-

reaſoning from ſcripture authority. He has indeed (p. 40) collected together a number of texts, but without any regard either to their authority or connexion; and I give him credit when he adds, at the concluſion, that "paſſages might be multiplied "upon paſſages," in the ſame manner and without end. He quotes ſome ſentences from the book of Job; but before we can bow to this authority as divine, Mr. W. muſt inform us whether it be the author of the book who is inſpired, or the ſpeakers, or both, and in what degree. The quotations are made from a ſpeech of Eliphaz, ch. xx. 14—16. "The imagination of "man's heart is evil from his youth," &c. But to Eliphaz, and his friends, Jehovah expreſsly declares, ch. xlii. 7. "You have "not ſpoken of me the thing that is right." Yet this man's doctrine, Mr. W. calls holy ſcripture, and cites as of divine authority. It would alſo be difficult to prove that David, in his penitential lamentation over his enormous crime, wrote under a divine impulſe, or that Solomon was ſupernaturally endowed with any other than

than political wiſdom. Mr. W. has alſo preſſed into his ſervice a text from St. Paul, Rom. vii. 24. "O wretched man that I am, "who ſhall deliver me from the body of "this death;" in which the apoſtle perſonifying an awakened jew, aſks where he ſhall find ſufficient power to releaſe him from the tyranny of thoſe vicious habits which the law, by driving him to deſpair, cheriſhed and ſtrengthened, and which continually adhered to him and diſtreſſed him, like a dead body faſtened to a living man. If Mr. W. doubts the truth of this interpretation, he may conſult thoſe truly eminent critics, Locke and Taylor. They likewiſe would inform him that the other text which he has quoted from the epiſtle to the Epheſians, ch. ii. 3. "We "were by nature children of wrath, even "as others," means nothing more than that the perſons to whom he wrote had been *originally* gentiles, enſlaved like others to the idolatries and the vices of their heathen ſtate *.

* He that reads and conſiders, ſays Mr. Locke in his notes upon the paſſage, cannot doubt that St. Paul here under the terms *we* and *our* ſpeaks of the gentile converts.

If

If I have in any degree vindicated to your ſatisfaction the character of the human ſpecies, and of its divine and benevolent Author, from the heavy and unproved charges alleged againſt both in the treatiſe of Mr. W. it will afford ſincere pleaſure to,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER V.

Concerning the ſuppoſed Evil Spirit, and the natural State of Man.

MADAM,

THE doctrine of a devil, and of his agency, of a being of pure malevolence, who is to every practical purpoſe omnipreſent and omniſcient, and endued with formidable and indefinite powers, whoſe ſole employment is to do miſchief and to tempt men to ſin, which finds a zealous advocate in Mr. W. is ſo highly improbable in itſelf, and bears ſo hard upon the wiſdom and benevolence of the divine character, that nothing ſhort of the moſt deciſive evidence can eſtabliſh the fact. In order to this it muſt firſt be proved, that the ſacred writers believed and taught the exiſtence and agency of this ſtrange and anomalous Being; and ſecondly, that this doctrine was communicated to them by revelation, and that they were authorized to make it known to the world. Neither of theſe points can be made out to the ſatisfaction of an intelligent and critical reader

reader of the ſcriptures: the doctrine therefore falls to the ground. And I, for one, am not aſhamed to avow that I regard the notion of a devil and his agency, as "an evaneſcent pre-"judice which it is now a diſcredit to a man "of underſtanding to believe." p. 42.

Mr. W. however, affirms, with his uſual confidence (p. 42.) "That the word of God "inſtructs us that we have to contend not "only with our own natural depravity, but "with the power of darkneſs, the *Evil* "*Spirit*, who rules in the hearts of the "wicked, and whoſe dominion we learn "from ſcripture to be ſo general as to en-"title him to the denomination of the "Prince of this World." He further adds "that the exiſtence and agency of the "Evil Spirit are diſtinctly and repeatedly "affirmed in ſcripture."

But notwithſtanding theſe poſitive aſſertions, the truth is, that the exiſtence of an evil ſpirit is no where expreſsly taught as a doctrine of revelation. It was unknown to the jews previous to the captivity, but was probably borrowed by their learned men, at that time, from the oriental philoſophy, of which it is well

well known to have conſtituted an eſſential part. After their return it became, in proceſs of time, the popular creed, and the popular language being gradually faſhioned to it, was adopted equally by thoſe who did, and thoſe who did not believe the theory upon which it was founded. Hence in the New Teſtament we find evil natural and moral often aſcribed to the devil, to demons, or the ghoſts of wicked men*. But neither Jeſus nor his apoſtles ever explicitly declare that they themſelves admitted the philoſophy which governed the language of the country in which they lived, much leſs do they profeſs to teach it as of divine authority. They leave the mythology of evil ſpirits, like many other popular opinions and prejudices, in the ſame ſtate in which they found it, to be corrected in the courſe of time by the principles which they taught, and by the growing good ſenſe of mankind. We may indeed fancy that they ought to have contradicted the doctrine if it had not been true, or, at leaſt, that they ought not to have countenanced it by the uſe of popular language. But what right have we to aſſert this, or to dictate to the Supreme

* See Farmer on the Demoniacs.

Being

Being, to what objects revelation ſhall extend. The fact is, that the firſt teachers of chriſtianity neither poſitively affirm nor authoritatively contradict the exiſtence and agency of an evil ſpirit; but expreſs themſelves upon this ſubject exactly as the reſt of their contemporaries would. The doctrine therefore reſts upon its own evidence, that is, upon no evidence at all.

Upon this ſubject Mr. W. contents himſelf with aſſertion without proof. He indeed tells us that "the evil ſpirit is entitled to the denomination of the prince "of this world." The expreſsion occurs John xiv. 30. "The prince of this world "cometh and hath nothing in me." It is not eaſy to aſcertain the ſenſe of this text, but to explain it of the devil is perfectly arbitrary. Perhaps, the true meaning is that Jeſus was about to be unjuſtly arreſted by order of the magiſtrate.* And upon this

* See a ſimilar expreſſion, 1 Cor. ii. 8. where the jewiſh rulers who crucified our Lord are certainly the perſons intended. "Which none of the princes of this "world knew, for had they known it they would not "have crucified the Lord of Glory."

interpretation what becomes of the argument for the univerſal dominion of the evil ſpirit.

Mr. W. mentions no other text as countenancing his doctrine, excepting p. 46. where he quotes Jude, vſ. 6. "The angels who "kept not their firſt eſtate he has reſerved in "everlaſting chains under darkneſs unto the "judgment of the great day." The writer of this obſcure epiſtle here argues with his readers upon their profeſſed principles, alluding to a mythology, which probably was at that time familiar, but is now loſt; nor can any thing be inferred from a compoſition the genuineneſs of which is known to be very doubtful. At any rate it proves nothing concerning diabolical agency, for it repreſents the fallen angels as not ranging at liberty, but bound in chains.

Mr. W. is pleaſed to remark, p. 43. That "although the ſcripture doctrine", as he unwarrantably terms it, "concerning "the evil ſpirit is thus generally exploded, "yet were we to conſider the matter ſe-"riouſly and fairly, we ſhould probably find "ground for believing that there is no bet-

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" ter reaſon for its being abandoned, than
" that many abſurd ſtories concerning ſpi-
" rits and apparitions have been uſed to be
" believed and propagated amongſt weak
" and credulous people, and that the evil
" ſpirit not being the object of our bodily
" eyes, it would be an inſtance of the ſame
" weakneſs to give credit to the doctrine of
" its exiſtence and agency."

The diſputant who can urge this weak objection, may, perhaps, be ſatisfied with Mr. W's. irrelevant reply: in which all that he attempts to prove is, that it is no more incredible that an immaterial being ſhould be a tempter, than a material one. He ſeems, indeed, to think it neceſſary to help out his argument with the unqualified aſſertion, p. 44. that to " deny the ex-
" iſtence and operation of theſe qualities
" in an immaterial being, is in *direct con-*
" *tradiction to the authority of ſcripture.*"
But as no ſuch authority is produced, we may hope to be excuſed if we do not, upon his bare word, admit a doctrine which appears to be unfounded in argument or experience, and ſubverſive of the moſt im-

portant principles of natural and revealed religion.

The true reaſon why men of ſenſe reject the notion of diabolical agency is, the total want of evidence to prove it. As philoſophers they diſcover no phænomena which countenance the hypotheſis of an inviſible malignant energy, and as attentive readers of the chriſtian ſcriptures, they ſee nothing to warrant ſuch a concluſion, but a ſort of language, which a competent acquaintance with the oriental ſtyle would teach them to interpret in a figurative and mythological, and not in a literal and hiſtorical ſenſe.

It is obſerved, p. 44. that "this to-"pic, however it may excite the ridicule "of the inconſiderate, will ſuggeſt matter "of ſerious apprehenſion to all who form "their opinions on the authority of the "word of God: Thus brought as we are "into captivity and expoſed to danger, "depraved and weakened within, and "tempted from without, it might well fill "our hearts with anxiety, &c." And indeed it would be a moſt alarming conſideration, if we had reaſon to believe, that we lay

lay at the mercy of what our author calls the evil ſpirit; or that any ſuch being was permitted to hold intercourſe with this world, and to gain acceſs to the human mind. Happily for us, there is no evidence from reaſon to prove that any ſpirit, good or evil, ſhares with the Supreme in the government of the univerſe; nor do the ſcriptures carefully ſtudied and rightly underſtood, authorize any ſuch unphiloſophical and miſchievous opinion.

Mr. W. towards the concluſion of this ſection, reverts to his favourite doctrine of the corruption of human nature, the diſbelief of which, according to him, is attended with the moſt fatal conſequences. "It is here, he ſays, p. 50. that our foun-" dation muſt be laid, otherwiſe our ſuper-" ſtructure will prove tottering and inſe-" cure. This is no metaphyſical ſpecula-" tion, but a practical matter. Slight and " ſuperficial conceptions of our natural ſtate " of degradation, and of our inſufficiency " to recover from it of ourſelves, produce " a fatal inſenſibility to the Divine warn-" ing, &c." All this is eloquent decla-

mation and positive assertion, but it wants proof.

It is curious to mark the progress of Mr. W's system, P. 26. "We are by nature "tainted with sin, not slightly and super- "ficially but radically, and to the very "core." P. 42. "In addition to this, we "have to contend with an evil spirit, who "rules in the hearts of the wicked." P. 46. "Revelation teaches that the wages of sin "is death," that is P. 60. "An *eternity* of un- "speakable misery." P. 45. "The account "it gives of the character of our Judge, "and of the probable principles of his deter- "mination serves to turn painful apprehen- "sion into fixed and certain terror." P. 50. "Deliverance is proclaimed and, indeed, "offered, and we are plainly admonished to "work out our salvation, but we are una- "ble of ourselves to will or to do rightly."

In this state the great mass of mankind are left. Born into the world with a nature radically tainted with sin, they can neither will nor do any thing without that aid which God will not impart, and for want of which they are doomed to eternal and un-

unſpeakable miſery. Theſe, according to Mr. W. are the fundamental and peculiar doctrines of that goſpel which we are aſſured "contains glad tidings of great joy "for all people." Happily for us, Madam, "we have not ſo learned Chriſt."

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Objection to the Doctrine of the Corruption of Human Nature farther conſidered.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce is very ingenuous in ſtating the objections of his opponents, which is a proof that he writes under a full conviction of the truth of his own principles. And though I agree with our author (p. 19) that "Sincerity is not all in all," we muſt ſtill allow it to hold a diſtinguiſhed place in the catalogue of virtues, though it may ſometimes be aſſociated with error and prejudice. It muſt however excite ſurpriſe in an attentive reader that he can be perfectly ſatisfied with his own anſwers to the objections which he ſo fairly ſtates.

He introduces (p. 53) "a bold objector, "facing about and ſtanding at bay, endeavouring to juſtify what he cannot deny. "Whatever I am, he contends, *I am "what my Creator made me.* I inherit "a nature, you yourſelf confeſs, depraved

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" ed, and prone to evil: how then can
" I withſtand the temptations to ſin with
" which I am environed? If this plea can-
" not eſtabliſh my innocence, it muſt ex-
" cuſe, or at leaſt extenuate my guilt.
" Frail and weak as I am, a Being of in-
" finite juſtice and goodneſs will never try
" me by a rule, which however equitable
" in the caſe of creatures of a higher na-
" ture, is altogether diſproportionate to
" mine."

This is the language which Mr. W. puts into the mouth of his *bold* objector. But if this objector were to grow a little *bolder* ſtill, and not to be afraid of ſpeaking out plainly, he might add; " Being what my
" Creator made me, naturally prone to evil,
" tainted to the very core with ſin, unable
" even to *will* what is right, how is it poſ-
" ſible that a God of infinite juſtice and
" goodneſs ſhould condemn me to eternal
" miſery, for not having extricated myſelf
" from the wretched condition in which he
" himſelf has fixed me, without ability to
" move?"

If Mr. W. can return a ſatisfactory reply to theſe objections, he muſt be an able advocate indeed. Let us then examine his arguments.

Mr. W. firſt (p. 53) warns his readers "not to be alarmed, as the writer is not "going to enter into the diſcuſsion of the "grand queſtion concerning the origin of "moral evil." Indeed there ſeems little occaſion for an alarm upon this head, as the only queſtion is about a plain ſimple fact. Can infinite juſtice and goodneſs doom a being to eternal miſery, for no other cauſe, but that of not extricating himſelf out of the ſtate in which his Creator placed him, without any power to act or will? I ſee nothing in this caſe which involves queſtions, "the full and clear compre-"henſion of which is above the intellect "of man;" no difficulty which a man of common underſtanding might not ſolve with as much facility as the profoundeſt metaphyſician or the ableſt moraliſt. Indeed it is a queſtion which ſufficiently anſwers itſelf; and hardy is the diſputant who will ſeriouſly maintain the affirmative.

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Mr. W. diſtinguiſhes his opponents into *ſceptics* and believers. And (p. 54) "he "deſpairs of ſatisfying the ſceptic of the "ſoundneſs of his own reaſonings, though "he thinks it not very difficult to expoſe "the futility of thoſe of the ſceptic." He argues, "that as his pre-conceptions con-"cerning the conduct of the Supreme "Being, have been in fact already con-"tradicted, particularly by the exiſtence "of natural or moral evil, having been "proved erroneous in one inſtance, they "might alſo in another." But the analogy will not hold. It may be allowed that the exiſtence of evil under the divine government would not antecedently have been expected. The fact however being eſtabliſhed, it may not be difficult to reconcile it to the wiſdom and benevolence of the divine character. But, the radical corruption of human nature, in conſequence of which the maſs of mankind are doomed to helpleſs and to hopeleſs miſery, never has, and never can be proved to be a fact; and could the exiſtence of this radical corruption be eſtabliſhed, the eternal puniſhment

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of it could never be reconciled to any principle of juſtice.

Mr. W. thinks, that "the beſt method "of convincing a ſceptic, would be firſt "to prove the truth of our holy reli- "gion," and then (p. 55) to "put it to "him whether all this weight of evidence "were to be overbalanced by this one diffi- "culty upon a ſubject ſo confeſſedly high "and myſterious."

Mr. W. is perfectly right in concluding that no intelligent ſceptic would be ſatis- fied with the ſoundneſs of ſuch reaſonings. Such an one would deny the ſubject to be either high or myſterious. No axiom can be more ſelf-evident than this, that if God be juſt, he cannot make men naturally corrupt and vicious, and then condemn them to eternal miſery for being ſo. And if he has any rational ideas of the Supreme Being, he will never admit that to be a revelation from heaven, which contains a doctrine ſo flagrantly repugnant to his per- fections.

Mr. W. deſpairing of making much im- preſsion upon ſceptics, proceeds to addreſs

himſelf (p. 56) to believers; " and in " order to convince all ſuch that there is, " ſomewhere or other, a fallacy in the " objector's reaſoning, he ſays, it will be " ſufficient to eſtabliſh, that though the " word of God clearly aſſerts the juſtice and " goodneſs of the Supreme Being, and alſo " the natural depravity of man, yet it no " leſs clearly lays down, that this natural " depravity ſhall never be admitted as an ex- " cuſe for ſin;" and that, " the holy ſcrip- " tures are clear and full in guarding us " againſt ſuppoſing our ſins, or the dread- " ful conſequences of them, to be charge- " able upon God.".

If Mr. W's. believer would be ſatisfied with ſuch reaſoning as this, it is well; but a rational chriſtian, who reads the ſcriptures with attention, and makes them their own interpreters, would reply; that no ſuch doctrine as natural or hereditary depravity is revealed in them; much leſs do they denounce eternal miſery as the inevitable conſequence of natural corruption. And that the notion altogether is ſo palpably repugnant to truth and juſtice, that if one

one or two detached paſſages ſhould even ſeem to give countenance to it, ſuch inſulated texts ought to be interpreted in a ſenſe conſonant to the general tenor of the ſcriptures, and the acknowledged perfections of God.

It is ſuggeſted (p. 58) as the "beſt practical anſwer to the difficulty, that if our "natural condition be depraved and weak, "our temptations numerous, and our Al"mighty Judge infinitely holy; yet that "the offers to *penitent* ſinners of pardon "and grace are univerſal and unlimited." But, with Mr. W's. leave, this is no anſwer to the difficulty at all. The objection does not by any means reſpect thoſe, who by the agency of the Holy Spirit are regenerated, and made true penitents, and who certainly have no reaſon to complain as far as they are perſonally concerned; but it reſpects the great maſs of mankind, who having been created depraved, and the requiſite aſſiſtance being withheld, are therefore doomed to eternal miſery. And he has not yet advanced a ſingle ſtep towards the removal of this difficulty.

Mr. W. it ſeems, not perfectly ſatisfied with his own reaſonings, either with believers or unbelievers, finds it convenient to have recourſe to the uſual aſylum of *myſtery*. "Let it not ſurpriſe us," ſays he, (p. 59) "if in all this there ſeem to be involved "difficulties which we cannot fully comprehend," adding, "that many ſuch every "where preſent themſelves that in this "our ignorance we may calmly repoſe on "the divine declaration, that righteouſneſs "and judgement are the habitation of his "throne; that it is true wiſdom to attach "ourſelves to what is plain and obvious; "aſſenting to what is revealed where above "our faculties, on the credit of what is "clearly diſcerned, &c." But all this is irrelevant declamation. We again and again deny that there is any myſtery in the caſe. The doctrine laid down by Mr. W. is perfectly intelligible, and it is plainly contradictory to every principle of juſtice, to every attribute of Deity, and to the whole tenor of divine revelation.

But

But if neither reaſoning nor myſtery will anſwer the objection, *anathemas* offer their ready ſervice to ſupply the deficiency; not indeed in the old and rugged form of eccleſiaſtical commination, but in the humbler guiſe of pathetic lamentation. "It is in-"deed an awful and affecting ſpectacle," ſays our author (p. 60) "to ſee men thus "buſying themſelves in theſe vain ſpecula-"tions of an arrogant curioſity, and trifling "with their deareſt their everlaſting in-"tereſts." But Mr. W. may be aſſured that men of ſenſe, who are truly concerned for the credit of the chriſtian religion, will not be intimidated by unjuſt charges of improper motives, nor by unauthorized inſinuations of divine diſpleaſure, &c. from a rigorous enquiry into the pretenſions of thoſe doctrines which falſely aſſume the name and credit of revealed truths; or from expoſing them to the contempt and indignation which they deſerve. And though many may be diſpoſed to treat ſuch enquiries as "vain ſpeculations," and may think it beſt that men ſhould "*repoſe in their* "*ignorance*;" there are ſome who will not think

think their time unworthily occupied in endeavouring to clear the chriſtian doctrine from the corruptions with which it is encumbered.

Mr. Wilberforce (p. 61) illuſtrates what he calls "the exquiſite folly of this conduct, by comparing it with that of ſome "convicted rebel, who, when brought into "the preſence of his ſovereign, inſtead of "ſeizing the occaſion to ſue for mercy, "ſhould even neglect and trifle with the "pardon which ſhould be offered him, and "inſolently employ himſelf in prying into "his ſovereign's deſigns and criticiſing his "counſels."

But let me aſk which of the two has moſt reaſon to apprehend his ſovereign's diſpleaſure, the man who groſsly traduces his prince's character, and repreſents him as an arbitrary, malignant, and odious tyrant, or he who endeavours to reſcue his adminiſtration from groundleſs and unjuſt imputations, and to convince his fellow-ſubjects that the government under which they live, is wiſe, and juſt, and beneficent? Let not Mr. W. then be ſo ready

to denounce judgment upon his fellow-chriſtians who think more honourably of the Sovereign of the Univerſe than himſelf; and who are deſirous of counteracting thoſe injurious miſrepreſentations of the divine government, which he has (inadvertently no doubt, and without any evil intention) ſo induſtriouſly diſſeminated.

I am, Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

Concerning what Mr. Wilberforce calls, "ſcrip-
"ture doctrines."

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce having finiſhed his obſervations upon the "inadequate conceptions "generally entertained of the importance of "chriſtianity," and upon "the corruption "of human nature, proceeds (c. 3) to repreſent what he eſteems the "chief defects "of the religious ſyſtem of the bulk of "profeſſed chriſtians in what regards our "Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and the Holy Spirit;" and begins (Sect. 1.) with ſtating what he calls "ſcripture doctrines."

In the firſt of theſe, all chriſtians will verbally unite, viz. "that God ſo loved the "world, as of his tender mercy to give his "only Son Jeſus Chriſt for our redemp-"tion." Mr. W. has not explained the ſenſe in which he underſtands theſe words; nor is it material. The true meaning prob-

ably is, that the miſsion of Jeſus was appointed by the goodneſs of God to recover men from the empire of idolatry and vice, and from the bondage of the ceremonial law.

His next poſition is, "That our bleſſed "Lord *willingly* left the glory of the Father "and was made man."

Mr. W. does not affect to expreſs this doctrine in the language of the New Teſtament, and with good reaſon; for how clearly ſoever it may be contained in articles and creeds, nothing like it is to be found in the chriſtian ſcriptures. That Jeſus of Nazareth was "willingly" made a human being, is a thought too extravagant to have entered the minds of the ſacred writers, nor is it in any degree countenanced by the language they adopt.

Amongſt other texts Mr. W. quotes a celebrated paſſage from Iſa. liii. "the Lord "laid upon him the iniquity of us all;" from which ſome have ſtrangely inferred, that Jeſus bore all the ſufferings due to the ſins of the elect. It probably alludes to the ceremony of the ſcape-goat, Lev. xvi. which

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is repreſented as carrying away into the wilderneſs the ſins of ignorance of the whole people, which Aaron confeſſed laying his hand upon its head; and means no more than that the errors and vices of a heathen ſtate are no longer a bar to the exerciſe of mercy, but that God by Jeſus Chriſt communicates the bleſsings of the goſpel with equal freedom to jews and gentiles. In alluſion to this it is alſo ſaid, that "he bore "away their iniquities;" and that "he "took away the ſins of *the many*;" that is, of the gentiles; meaning, that by him God freely exerciſed mercy to the heathen world*.

Mr. W. alſo cites, Rom. viii. 34. "He is "now at the right hand of God, making "interceſsion for us." This office of interceſsion is alſo aſcribed to Jeſus in another text, Heb. vii. 25. "He ever liveth to make "interceſsion for them." The exact import of the phraſe it is very difficult to aſcertain. Probably, indeed, the writers themſelves annexed no very diſtinct idea to

* See Iſa. liii. 11. 12. Mr. Dodſon's tranſlation.

it. At any rate the literal and popular interpretation cannot be true; for God, an infinite ſpirit, hath no right hand at which Jeſus can ſtand to intercede. The word in the original expreſſes any interference of one perſon *for* or *againſt* another*; and all that we can certainly learn from the apoſtle's declaration is, that Jeſus, having been advanced to great dignity and felicity, is, by the appointment of God, continually employing his renovated and improved powers in ſome unknown way for the benefit of his church. We may *imagine* what we pleaſe, but more than this is not revealed, and therefore more than this, it cannot be neceſſary for us to believe.

The diſtinct perſonal exiſtence of the *Holy Spirit*, which our author ſeems to aſſume, (p. 63) is, I believe, abandoned by every perſon who has paid much attention to the phraſeology of the ſcriptures; and can indeed be maintained upon no other principles but ſuch as would equally prove that wind, fire, and peſtilence, the plagues

* See Dr. Taylor's Note on Rom. viii. 27.

of

of Egypt, and the ſcriptures themſelves, were real perſons. Dr. Lardner has ſet this ſubject in ſo clear a light in his firſt poſtſcript to his celebrated letter on the Logos, that the controverſy is almoſt as much at reſt as that concerning tranſubſtantiation. Whether it be the doctrine of "our excellent liturgy" or not, is of little conſequence to the enquirer who looks to the ſcriptures *only* for information concerning revealed truth.

Mr. W. (p. 64) "wiſhes to God it could "be preſumed that all who aſſent to his "opinions in terms, diſcern their force and "excellency in the underſtanding, and feel "their power in the affections, and their "transforming influence in the heart." And he thinks (p. 65) that "had we duly felt "the burden of our ſins, that they are a "load which our own ſtrength is wholly "unable to ſupport, and that the weight "of them muſt finally ſink us into perdi-"tion, our hearts would have danced at "the ſound of the gracious invitation, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are "heavy laden, and I will give you reſt. "But in thoſe who have ſcarcely felt their

" ſins as any incumbrance, it would be " mere affectation to pretend to very ex- " alted conceptions of the value and ac- " ceptableneſs of the proffered deliver- " ance."

Such expreſsions as *feeling the burden and inſupportable load of ſin*, may perhaps be ſuitable to perſons of very profligate characters, but it is abſurd to apply ſuch language univerſally. For perſons educated in chriſtian principles, habits, and duties, who have never deviated into groſs vices, it would be " mere affectation" to pretend to feel that load and burden upon their minds which is the proper concomitant of atrocious guilt: Nor do I ſee any uſe in men of upright and virtuous characters, repreſenting themſelves to their own imaginations, as demons and monſters. Neither the language, nor the examples of ſcripture warrant any thing of the kind. Our Saviour's invitation above cited, is addreſſed not to ſinners in particular, but to perſons ſuffering under the heavy load of phariſaic rites, which on another occaſion he calls " burdens grievous to be borne;" and in com-

compariſon with which his own religion, was a "gentle and an eaſy yoke."

But Mr. W. fancies, that without this "feeling of the burden of ſin," we ſhall have no very exalted conceptions of the "proſ-"fered deliverance;" and as error is often ſyſtematical, and one leading prejudice involves a train of others, I can agree with him, that without this *fanciful* notion of the weight and burden of ſin, there will be little occaſion for his equally *fanciful* doctrines of ſatisfaction, atonement, interceſſion, and ſupernatural influence. But a perſon who is ſatisfied with the ſimple ſcheme of the New Teſtament without theſe ſuperfluous, ſupplementary articles, will, while he maintains a proper ſenſe of the dignity of human nature, and reflects with pleaſure upon the purity and integrity of his general character, ſee great reaſon to be thankful for the deliverance of ſo large a part of the world from the bondage of idolatry by the promulgation of the goſpel, and for the glorious proſpect of immortal life and happineſs which it opens to view, and by which it ſtrengthens the fortitude

and

and animates the zeal of every virtuous believer.

It is obſerved (p. 68) that "the Unitarian and Socinian, who deny or explain away the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel, may be allowed to feel and talk of theſe grand truths with little emotion."

Mr. W. here makes a juſt diſtinction, which though ſufficiently obvious in itſelf, is often through ignorance, or deſign, overlooked, namely that between the Socinian, and the Unitarian. The former believes, that although Jeſus had no exiſtence before his birth, yet that ſince his reſurrection he has been advanced to the government of the univerſe; a notion unſcriptural and moſt incredible. But a conſiſtent Unitarian, acknowledging Jeſus as a man in all reſpects "like to his brethren," regards his kingdom as entirely of a ſpiritual nature, and as conſiſting in the empire of his goſpel over the hearts and lives of its profeſſors.

Unitarian chriſtians believe in the reſurrection of their venerated Maſter, and upon his authority confirmed by that event, they entertain a chearful perſuaſion, that if they obey

obey his goſpel, and follow his great example in a fearleſs profeſsion of truth, and an upright diſcharge of duty, they ſhall in due time be raiſed by the power of God to a happy and immortal life.

Of ſuch chriſtians as theſe Mr. W. aſſerts with a tone of authority which the conſciouſneſs of infallibility alone could warrant, that they "deny or explain away the "peculiar doctrines of the goſpel." But their ſevere cenſor may be aſſured, that they have learned from higher authority than his, that "it is a very ſmall thing to "be judged of man's judgment*." And they would requeſt him ſeriouſly to reflect, whether he may not himſelf be liable to the charge, of making unauthoriſed additions to the genuine doctrine of chriſtianity, which deface its beauty, obſtruct its progreſs, and diminiſh its practical effect.

Mr. W. proceeds (p. 69) to deſcribe love to Chriſt as "an ardent active principle," and he inſiſts upon the natural expreſsions of ſtrong affections, as applicable to this

* 1. Cor. iv. 3.

caſe.

caſe. But the only criterion of genuine regard which our Maſter himſelf preſcribes, is the practice of virtue from reſpect to the motives of the goſpel. " He that hath my " commandments and keepeth them, he it " is that loveth me." Whoever therefore poſſeſſes this authentic character of genuine affection to Chriſt, may reſt perfectly ſatisfied, whether they do or do not come up to our author's ſtandard of ardent feeling.

In (p. 71) we have a complaint that " the " doctrine of the ſanctifying operations of " the Holy Spirit appears to have met with " ſtill worſe treatment than that of love to " Chriſt." But Mr. W. himſelf " appears" to be under a conſiderable error upon this ſubject, for want of ſufficient attention to the true ſenſe of the ſcripture language.

It is evident to every perſon competently acquainted with ſacred phraſeology, that the *Spirit of God* ſometimes ſignifies, *God himſelf*, and ſometimes, divine *inſpiration*. The *Holy Spirit* uſually means the *miraculous powers* communicated to the apoſtles, by which the chriſtian religion was confirmed

at

at its firſt promulgation; and jews and heathens having been converted by this impreſsive evidence, they are ſaid to be regenerated, renewed, or ſanctified by the Holy Spirit; that is, recovered from a ſtate of heatheniſm or phariſaiſm, which is in ſcripture language a ſtate of alienation from God, and enmity to him, into a ſtate of viſible profeſsion, and of privilege. Mr. W. and many others, underſtand that in a moral ſenſe, which the writers intend in a ceremonial, and apply expreſsions indiſcriminaiely to all perſons, which the connexion and ſcope of the paſſage limits to the firſt converts from judaiſm and heatheniſm.

Mr. W's creed repreſenting the Holy Spirit as a divine perſon, equal with the Father, whoſe office it is to ſanctify the heart, naturally leads him to diſcuſs the doctrine of a divine influence upon the mind for moral purpoſes, (p. 72, 75.) But it has never yet been proved that any ſupernatural influence upon the mind is neceſſary under the divine government, or that it has ever exiſted, except in a few very extraordinary caſes. Every philoſophic theiſt will allow, that

that all events are brought to paſs agreably to the divine foreknowledge, and according to the wiſe and benevolent counſels of God. Alſo, that a divine energy is actually exerted in every event, according to certain rules which God has preſcribed to himſelf, few will deny. True philoſophy, and true religion, lead us to ſee God in every thing. But that he *ever*, much more that he *frequently* deviates from his uſual courſe to produce effects upon the human mind, which would not have reſulted from the natural operation of general laws, is a fact improbable in itſelf, and of which we have no ſatisfactory evidence, either from experience or revelation. In popular language, the virtuous affections of virtuous men, are with great propriety aſcribed to God; and the pious writers of the ſcriptures have often adopted this form of expreſsion. Whether they themſelves believed in the exiſtence of frequent ſupernatural operations upon the mind, does not clearly appear; and it is certain that they no where affirm, that it conſtituted any part of their commiſsion, to teach this extraordinary

and improbable doctrine. The agency which they admitted extends to evil as well as to good; "it hardens the heart of Pharoah *," as well as "opens that of Lydia †;" and therefore it is a general, and not a particular influence. Conſequently, the popular language of the ſacred writings by no means authoriſes the concluſion, that God ever interpoſes ſupernaturally to produce moral effects upon the mind; the expectation of which is liable to great abuſe, and has often been productive of very pernicious conſequences.

This ſection concludes with a juſt and honourable teſtimony to the excellent character, and the prudent and ſucceſsful zeal of the Moravian brethren, in which I moſt chearfully concur; but I would take occaſion incidentally to remark, that a religious party may be very numerous, very pious, and benevolent, very zealous and ſucceſsful, and yet by Mr. W's own conceſsion (for he is no Moravian himſelf) its diſtinguiſhing tenets may be erroneous and unſcriptural.

I am, Madam, &c.

* Exod. vii. 3. † Acts xvi. 14.

LETTER VIII.

Concerning the admiſsion of the Paſsions in Religion. Of Love to Chriſt.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce, p. 80... 86. treats at conſiderable length on the admiſsion of the paſsions, or affections, into religion: the reaſonableneſs and importance of which, under proper regulations, will not be diſputed by any who think juſtly upon the ſubject. Religion can hardly be ſaid to exiſt without them. Affections being internal feelings, which ariſe naturally, and ſpontaneouſly, from correſpondent views and apprehenſions of their ſpecific objects; complacency, gratitude, reverence, confidence, joy, and reſignation, will be neceſſarily generated by frequent ſerious contemplation of the Supreme Being, as a perfectly wiſe, powerful, and benevolent father, benefactor, friend, governor, and judge. And affections ſo formed will be a powerful ſtimulus to that courſe of conduct which will be moſt acceptable to God. Devotion

votion gives energy and dignity to virtue, and the chriſtian revelation juſtly repreſents *love to God* as the " firſt and great com-" mandment."

It is, however, neceſſary to obſerve, that love to God is a beneficial affection, only in proportion to the truth, and juſtice of the ideas which men entertain, of the divine attributes and government. If we conceive of God as perfectly benevolent and wiſe, and deſirous of the happineſs of his creatures as the ſole end of his righteous adminiſtration, love to him will be a rational and a delightful affection, and will naturally expreſs itſelf not only in external acts of grateful homage, but in univerſal complacency and good will, and in a ſolicitous concern to co-operate with the beneficent Creator in doing good, in alleviating miſery, and in diffuſing happineſs.

But if our ideas of the Supreme Being are erroneous and unjuſt, the affections towards him will be proportionably diſtorted. It will be difficult to conceive of God as an arbitrary and capricious tyrant, without being on the one hand overwhelmed with terror,

or on the other, diſpoſed to cheriſh the affections we aſcribe to him, and to regard the ſuppoſed objects of Divine diſpleaſure, with diſguſt and malevolence. The hiſtory of religion, in all ages, is replete with the baneful effects of that "zeal for God which "is not according to knowledge."

After all, though the objects of religion are of ſufficient dignity and magnitude to excite and intereſt our beſt affections, when ſteadily contemplated, it ought to be remembered that a mechanical glow of the paſsions is by no means eſſential to the practice of religion and virtue, eſpecially at the commencement of a virtuous courſe. Men enter upon and purſue their occupations in life, not from paſsionate feelings, but from rational conviction that theſe are the beſt means of providing in a juſt and honourable way for the ſubſiſtence, comfort, and reſpectability of themſelves and their families: and if the employment is at firſt irkſome, the principles upon which they act will ſtimulate them to perſeverance, and by degrees they will form an attachment to profeſsions to which originally they were little inclined. In like manner, a perſon of reflection

reflection will enter upon the practice of religious virtue, not from any paſsionate and tranſient emotions, but from the deliberate conviction of his judgment, that a pious and virtuous conduct will be ultimately conducive to his beſt intereſt; and though the practice of virtue may occaſionally be unpleaſant, may require ſelf-denial, and may expoſe him to difficulties and inconveniencies, which would ſubdue a reſolution inſpired only by the paſsions, they will make little impreſsion upon a purpoſe which originates in the deliberate conviction of the underſtanding. And by degrees, habits of rectitude will be inſenſibly eſtabliſhed, and virtue will be loved and practiſed for its own ſake. The religious principle is of too much importance to be made dependent upon the paſsions, which wiſe men diſcard in all affairs of moment, leſt they ſhould warp and miſlead the judgment.

Mr. W. concludes his ſection, p. 96. with the application of his doctrine concerning the uſe of the paſsions in religion, not, as might naturally have been expected, to the Supreme Being, but to Jeſus Chriſt; whom he repreſents as "The proper object of love, gra-

" titude, joy, hope, and truſt," which he apprehends that no one can deny " without " being dead to every generous emotion, and " bluſhing with ſhame and indignation when " he looks his objection in the face." p. 98. Without feeling, however, any emotion either of fear, or ſhame, from any thing Mr. W. has advanced; I make no heſitation to aſſert, that the affection, which he inſiſts upon as due to Chriſt, has no juſt foundation in the repreſentations which the ſcripture exhibits of his perſon and character, or of his preſent ſtate and dignity, but that it originates in palpable error, and is directed wholly to a mere creature of the imagination.

Very far, indeed, am I from deſiring, or endeavouring to weaken that rational regard to Jeſus which he has himſelf required, and for which the goſpel lays a proper foundation. I revere his memory as the moſt excellent of human characters, and the moſt eminent of all the prophets of God, who was honoured with the high commiſsion of ſuperſeding the moſaic diſpenſation, and of revealing to all nations " the words of eternal life." I joyfully and thankfully embrace his doctrine,

doctrine, confide in his promiſe, and bow to his authority. This is all the love which he requires, and which his diſciples can properly exerciſe towards him. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them," ſaith our Lord himſelf, "he it is that loveth me*;" and who is authoriſed to ſubſtitute any other criterion of acceptable regard?

Jeſus is indeed now alive; and without doubt, employed in offices the moſt honourable and benevolent: but as we are totally ignorant of the place where he reſides, and of the occupations in which he is engaged, there can be no proper foundation for religious addreſſes to him, nor of gratitude for favours now received, nor yet of confidence in his future interpoſition in our behalf. All affections and addreſſes of this nature are unauthoriſed by the chriſtian revelation, and are infringements upon the prerogative of God.

If indeed we figure to ourſelves a being equal to the Supreme, or next in order and dignity below him; inveſted by him with the adminiſtration of the univerſe; voluntarily

* John xiv. 21.

rily aſſuming human nature; ſuffering upon the croſs the puniſhment due to the ſins of men; continually employed in interceding for them; ſupplying them with a perfect righteouſneſs to conceal the defects of their own characters; and guarding and protecting them in their paſſage through this world; the ſteady contemplation of this ideal perſon will naturally generate admiration, gratitude, joy, confidence, and other correſponding affections; and all this may be called love to Chriſt, confidence in him, and the like: and chriſtians who neither experience, nor pretend to ſuch extatic feelings may be treated with contempt, and repreſented as derogating from the glory of Chriſt. But ſuch a Being as this having, in fact, no real exiſtence, all theſe affections muſt be vain and illuſory, varying according to the variable fancies of men, and incapable of conſtituting wiſe and permanent principles of action.

But Mr. W. has texts at hand to ſupport his doctrine, which to ſuperficial readers will probably appear ſatisfactory, but which a little attention will eaſily reconcile to the general tenor of the ſcriptures concerning the

the perſon of Jeſus, as a man of like faculties and feelings with other human beings.

"In him," ſays the Apoſtle*, "dwelleth "all the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily." But this no more proves the proper deity of Chriſt, which is the purpoſe for which Mr. W. quotes it, than the expreſſions, "Being "filled with all the fulneſs of God †," or "being made partakers of a divine nature,§" prove the proper deity of all ſincere chriſtians. The meaning is, that a fulneſs of knowledge and power for the purpoſe of his miſsion was communicated to him by God.

Mr. W. alſo produces the text, Phil. II. 6. 8. "He thought it not robbery to be equal "with God," or rather *as* God or *like* God. The ſenſe of which is, that being indued with miraculous powers, here called, "being in "the form of God, he did not graſp at "ſimilitude to God," did not affect an oſtentatious diſplay of theſe powers for his own advantage, "but aſſuming the form of "a ſervant, he was made in the likeneſs of "men," that is, he appeared weak and

* Col. ii. 9. † Eph. iii. 19. § 2 Pet. i. 4.

helpleſs like another man*, and ſo "be-
"came obedient to death, even the death
"of the croſs." The ſubmiſsion of Jeſus to death is repreſented in the New Teſtament as an act of voluntary obedience, becauſe he always had it in his power to have reſcued himſelf by miracle, as he himſelf repeatedly declares; a privilege which no human being but himſelf ever poſſeſſed.

Mr. W. argues the propriety of truſting in Chriſt, from Heb. xiii. 8. "Jeſus Chriſt
"is the ſame yeſterday, and to day, and
"for ever." But in this paſſage the name of the prophet is put by a uſual figure of ſpeech for his doctrine, as the context evinces. For the inference which the writer immediately draws from the obſervation is, "Be
"not carried about with divers and ſtrange
"doctrines."

I am, Madam, &c.

* So Sampſon, Judges xvi. 17. tells his miſtreſs, that "If he is ſhaven he ſhall become weak, and be like any "man," i. e. as our tranſlators (not being, in this inſtance, warped by prejudice) have properly rendered it, like any *other* man: no longer poſſeſſed of extraordinary powers.

LETTER

LETTER IX.

The ſame ſubject continued. Errors concerning the Holy Spirit.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce, like a valorous knight, having chaſed his inviſible opponent, page 98. "From his favourite poſition, and *compelled* "him to acknowledge that the religious "affections towards our bleſſed Saviour are "not unreaſonable," determines now to follow up his victory, and to drive him from "his laſt retreat, viz. That by the very "conſtitution of our nature we are not ſuſ-"ceptible of affections towards an inviſi-"ble Being."

Our Author having now advanced pretty far into the wilderneſs of viſions and chimeras, it is not an eaſy matter to follow him over the enchanted ground. To all appearance however, his preſent attack is made upon a non-exiſting adverſary. That any perſon ſhould believe that Jeſus Chriſt is all that Mr. W. repreſents, that is, a God to whom

whom we are under greater obligations than to the Creator himſelf, having redeemed us from that miſerable ſtate in which our Maker had left us*, and yet to deny that this divine perſon is the proper object of religious affection, or that ſuch affections are practicable, is to me utterly incomprehenſible. But as Mr. W. labours the point with ſo much aſſiduity, it is to be ſuppoſed that he may have met with ſome reaſoners of this extraordinary caſt. As for thoſe who are content with the plain and ſimple account of Jeſus Chriſt in the New Teſtament, as a man approved of God, it is plain that to ſuch perſons the whole of his reaſoning is totally inapplicable, nor does he indeed affect to addreſs it to them.

To profeſſed chriſtians, who believe that a Divine Perſon aſſumed human nature, and died to ſave them from eternal miſery, and that he is now continually employed to

* Vide Mr. W. p. 123. "The merits and interceſſion "of Chriſt to which we are *wholly* indebted for our re- "conciliation with God, and for the will and the "power from firſt to laſt to work out our own ſalva- "tion." In our natural ſtate, that is as God made us, the author deſcribes us as "tainted with ſin to the very "core," without will or power to help ourſelves.

inter-

intercede for them and to defend them, and who, nevertheleſs, doubt whether it be reaſonable or practicable to love and confide in him, Mr. W. addreſſes the argument in his following ſection. And the tenor of his reaſoning is, that inviſible beings, when they are made the objects of ſteady meditation, or, as he quaintly expreſſes it, when they are brought into "cloſe contact," are capable of exciting the affections—that the relations in which we ſtand to ſuch a Chriſt as he deſcribes, have a peculiar tendency to awaken the affections—that it is the office of the holy ſpirit to excite them—that perſons who object to the poſsibility of ſuch affections have never uſed the proper means of attaining them—and that many eminent chriſtians, in all ages, have, by the uſe of the appointed means, made high attainments in theſe virtues. The only objection which can be made to this reaſoning, as an addreſs to men's profeſſed principles is, that it is propoſed to perſons who either have no occaſion for it, or whoſe underſtandings muſt be impenetrable to argument.

Mr.

Mr. W. in order to convince his callous believer of the practicability of love to Chriſt, though inviſible, aſſumes as a fact, p. 101. the extraordinary poſition that "There ap-
"pears naturally to be a certain ſtrangeneſs
"between the paſsion and its object, which
"familiarity and the power of habit muſt
"gradually overcome." He adds, "You
"muſt contrive to bring them into *cloſe*
"*contact*." After which he proceeds, at conſiderable length, formally to open, as he expreſſes it, p. 106. "The doctrine of cloſe
"contact," as though it were ſome new and important diſcovery in the philoſophy of the human mind, when, in truth, it amounts to nothing more than the old and familiar fact, that the affections are excited, not in proportion to the real value and magnitude of the object, but to the attention, voluntary or otherwiſe, which is paid to it, and that, whether the object be real or imaginary.

Mr. W. p. 102. to illuſtrate his propoſition that objects of viſion are not the only objects capable of attracting our regard, thinks
"that it might appear to be too nearly ap-
"proaching to the ludicrous to ſuggeſt, as an
"example

" example to the contrary, the metaphy-
" ſician's attachment to his unſubſtantial
" ſpeculations." What there is of ludicrous in thoſe profound ſpeculations, in thoſe acute and ſucceſsful reſearches into the phænomena of the human mind, which occupied the active and penetrating genius of a Locke and a Hartley, I am at a loſs to diſcover. This ſarcaſm upon the ſublime and uſeful ſcience of metaphyſics would well become a ſuperficial ſcioliſt, who might hope to conceal his ignorance under the veil of ridicule, but is unworthy of Mr. W. both as a man of liberality, and a ſcholar.

Mr. W. obſerves, p. 101, " That the
" diſtreſſes of a novel, which at the ſame
" time we know to be fictitious, affect us
" more than the dry narrative of a battle."
And it is an obvious fact that imaginary objects often excite the paſsions as vividly as real ones, even when known to be imaginary; and much more ſo, when, by any illuſion of the underſtanding, theſe creatures of the imagination are miſtaken for ſubſtantial beings. It is therefore an important branch of the diſcipline of the mind to diſtinguiſh between

tween imaginations and realities, and to fix the attention habitually and firmly upon things which are true and important, leſt fictitious objects ſhould take poſſeſſion of the affections, to the excluſion of thoſe which are of ſubſtantial value. And this appears to me to be preciſely the ſituation of Mr. W. and of thoſe who think and feel with him. The Jeſus, whom they array with the attributes of deity, and to whom they delegate the adminiſtration of the univerſe, is a phantom of their own imagination, totally unlike the humble prophet of Nazareth, and all the attention which they give, and the affections which they feel to ſuch a being are irrational and illuſory, and as far as they prevail, they derogate from the homage due to the one true God, the only proper object of all religious veneration and gratitude.

Mr. W. tells us (p. 107) that "Our bleſſed "Saviour is not removed far from us.—He "exhibits not himſelf to us *dark with ex-* "*ceſsive brightneſs*, but is let down as it were "to the poſsibilities of human converſe. "We may not think that he is incapable "of entering into our little concerns, and

" of ſympathizing with them." That is, in other words, that ſuch a being as we fancy Chriſt to be, is better adapted to our conceptions and affections than God himſelf. Such is the opinion which the papiſts entertain of the virgin Mary, and of their calendar ſaints, with whom they think they may be more familiar than with Jeſus Chriſt himſelf. Hence the abject ſuperſtitions and idolatries of the church of Rome; and indeed there is no end to the vagaries of the human mind when it transfers it's devout affections to any other being, than the living God.

Mr. W. ſupports his doctrine by a quotation from the epiſtle to the Hebrews, iv. 15. " He is not one who cannot be touched " with the feeling of our infirmities, hav- " ing been in all points tempted like as we " are." How this declaration can be made conſiſtent with Mr. W's doctrine of the divinity of Chriſt, it becomes him ſeriouſly to conſider. That a God ſhould be " in all " points tempted" like frail and ſinful man, appears to me a contradiction in terms. But the writer of this epiſtle having formally proved that though Chriſt was ſuperior to all former

former prophets, he was inferior to angels, and in all reſpects like to his brethren *, juſtly concludes, that having ſuffered like them, he now ſympathizes with them. And no doubt he does; but this fact lays no foundation for religious regards and addreſſes to him.

From the promiſe of our Lord to his apoſtles, John xiv. 18. "I will not leave "you *orphans*," Mr. W. ſtrangely draws the univerſal inference, that "the children "of Chriſt are here ſeparated from the per- "ſonal view of him, but not from his pater- "nal affection, and paternal care." But the virtuous, who are in the hands of God, the God and Father of Jeſus their Maſter, need no other protector. And the text quoted will not prove the point, for it is addreſſed to the apoſtles only; and our Lord immediately adds, "I will come unto "you," meaning, that he would ſoon viſit them again after his reſurrection, for their conſolation and triumph. It is added, p. 110,

* See Mr. Wakefield's tranſlation of the two firſt chapters of this epiſtle.

"that

" that we learn from the ſcriptures that it " is one main part of the operations of the " Holy Spirit to implant theſe heavenly " principles in the human mind, and to " cheriſh their growth." But we have before had occaſion to remark, that the ſcriptures do not teach the exiſtence of any ſuch perſon as the Holy Spirit, and that there is no foundation for the expectation of any ſupernatural operations upon the mind. Leaſt of all then can it be ſuppoſed, that ſuch operations would be exerted to produce affections towards a being who, having no exiſtence out of the imagination, nevertheleſs ſupplants the true God in the government of the univerſe, and in the hearts of his creatures.

In p. 111, we find an eloquent declamation upon the great effects of ſuch a " love " to the Redeemer," as Mr. W. recommends; which he ſays, " was the religion of " the holy martyrs of the ſixteenth century, " and which burned with an increaſe of " ardour in proportion to the perſecutions " with which they were aſſailed." And there can be no doubt that perſons who ſeri-

ouſly believe that Jeſus Chriſt is ſuch a being as Mr. W. deſcribes; and who have wrought themſelves up to a proportionable elevation of admiration, gratitude, joy, and confidence for his ſuppoſed condeſcenſions, labours, and ſufferings, and for his preſent protection, will often feel extatic joys and tranſports; and will, in the ardour of their zeal, chearfully ſubmit to ſufferings and death for the ſake of him to whom they imagine themſelves under theſe infinite obligations. Hereby demonſtrating, what? not the *truth* of their principles, but the ſincerity of their perſuaſion. I grant that many of the martyrs of the ſixteenth century, thought of Jeſus Chriſt as Mr. W. now does. They were men of great integrity, and inflexible courage in avowing what they believed to be evangelical truth, and in proteſting againſt the extravagant corruptions of the Romiſh church. But their creed is not our ſtandard. They were juſt emerging from the prejudices of an ignorant and ſuperſtitious age; and though they did as much as could be expected from men in their circumſtances, and ſucceſsfully expoſed many of the more flagrant errors of the

the papal religion, they could not at once, ſhake off the maſs of corruption, which had been accumulating for almoſt ſixteen centuries. They left much to be done by thoſe who came after them. We have as good a right to diſſent from their creed, when it is repugnant to the doctrine of the ſcriptures, as they had to detect and expoſe the errors of the Romiſh church. And I truſt, if the times ſhould ever require it, that the advocates for rational and ſcriptural religion, would be as ready, by their ſufferings to teſtify their zeal for truth, as the honeſt, but leſs enlightened confeſſors of an earlier age.

This ſection is cloſed with a reproof to nominal chriſtians, p. 113, "for ſcarcely "admitting, except in the moſt vague and "general ſenſe, the doctrine of the influ-"ence of the holy ſpirit;" adding, "that "if we look into the holy ſcriptures for in-"formation on this particular we learn a "very different leſſon." To this is ſubjoined, as uſual, a ſtring of texts detached from their connexion, which in *ſound* ſeem to confirm the aſſumption, but which when

critically examined, bear no ſuch meaning. Moſt of them relate to the ſtate of the heathen previous to their converſion, and to the wonderful effect of the miraculous powers of the apoſtles, in exciting their attention to the chriſtian doctrine, and thereby engaging them to the ſerious profeſsion of chriſtianity. Theſe in their heathen ſtate are repreſented as "children of wrath," and able to do nothing; but convinced by the miracles, and enlightened by the teaching of the apoſtles, they were "quickened as from the dead, "created anew to good works, put off the "old man with his deeds, and put on the "new man which is renewed after the "image of his Creator."

And the unchriſtianized world being figuratively repreſented as under the empire of Satan, that is, of idolatry and vice; when a heathen was converted to the chriſtian religion, he was ſaid to have been "tranſlated "out of the kingdom of Satan into that of "God's dear Son;" and, converſely, when a profeſſor of chriſtianity in conſequence of immoral conduct was diſcarded by the chriſtian community, he was ſaid to "be de-

"livered

" livered over to Satan;" that is, he ceaſed to be a member of the chriſtian church and was regarded as an unconverted heathen.

It deſerves to be particularly remarked here, that Mr. W. p. 113, deſcribes all men as " by nature children of wrath, and " under the power of the evil ſpirit, our " underſtandings being naturally dark, and " our hearts averſe from ſpiritual things;" and p. 114, the influence of the holy ſpirit is repreſented " as *originally* awaken- " ing us from ſlumber, as quickening us " when dead; as delivering us from the " power of the devil, and as drawing us to " God." Hence it follows that upon this ſyſtem, mankind can do nothing to extricate themſelves, from the wretched condition in which they are placed by their Creator, and that all relief muſt *originate* in the awakening, and quickening operations of the holy ſpirit. And if theſe are withheld, the hapleſs victims are inevitably doomed to eternal miſery. Yet Mr. W. and many others call this ſyſtem, chriſ-

tianity; and profeſs to believe that God is juſt!

In my judgment, language cannot ſupply words of ſufficient energy, to expreſs the odious malignity of character which is here aſcribed unjuſtly, I had almoſt ſaid profanely, to the Governor of the Univerſe.

Mr. W. in a note at the concluſion of this ſection, recommends Dr. Doddridge's ſermons on regeneration as a "moſt valua-"ble compilation." Dr. Doddridge was a man of great induſtry, ability, benevolence, and piety, but he was greatly miſled by an undue attachment to the popular ſyſtem of theology, and his works are not calculated to inſtruct his readers in the true ſenſe of the chriſtian ſcriptures, nor to infuſe into them a ſpirit of rational and manly piety. His ſermons upon regeneration, aſſume throughout an erroneous principle: applying expreſsions to all men indiſcriminately, which are limited by the connexion to the contemporaries of the apoſtles, and to the ſtate of the firſt converts to the chriſtian faith. And Dr. Doddridge, like

Mr.

Mr. W. contends for that ſupernatural influence upon the mind for moral purpoſes, which is neither conſiſtent with true philoſophy, with aſcertained facts, nor with the genuine doctrine of the chriſtian revelation.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER X.

Terms of Acceptance with God.

MADAM,

THERE is nothing in the whole compaſs of religion and morals, of greater importance to be clearly and diſtinctly known, than "the terms of acceptance with God," or in other words, the means which God has appointed, for the attainment of our ultimate happineſs. And theſe are ſo explicitly revealed in the ſcriptures both of the old and new teſtament, that no perſon of common underſtanding, who reads them attentively, and without prejudice, can fall into any material error upon this ſubject. The practice of virtue is always repreſented, as the only means of attaining happineſs, both here and hereafter. "To fear God, and "keep his commandments; to do juſtice, "to love mercy, to walk humbly with God, "to deny all ungodlineſs, and worldly paſ-"ſions, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly and "godlily

"godlily in the world; to ſeek for glory, "honour, and immortality, by patient con- "tinuance in well doing; in a word, to "love God with all the underſtanding, and "with all the heart, and to love our neigh- "bour as ourſelves, theſe are the clear and "equitable terms of ſalvation, both under "the old diſpenſation, and the new."

The apoſtles indeed inſiſt much on *faith* in Chriſt: and with great propriety, for their exhortations were uſually addreſſed to unbelieving jews, or to heathen idolaters, whom they were deſirous of introducing to the privileges and hopes of the chriſtian religion. But thoſe who already profeſſed chriſtianity are enjoined, not to believe, but to act conſiſtently with their profeſſion, and to be "careful to maintain good works."

The apoſtles alſo often dwell upon the *ſufferings* of Chriſt, and that for ſeveral reaſons. The death of Jeſus was the confirmation of his miſsion; it was the ſeal of that new covenant which he came to promulgate; it was the neceſſary preliminary to his reſurrection; and the public execution of the founder of this new religion being

ing

ing objected to its profeſſors as an indelible diſgrace, the firſt teachers of chriſtianity were ſolicitous to ſhew, that they were not aſhamed to avow themſelves the diſciples of a crucified Maſter. "They gloried in the "croſs of Chriſt, and determined to know "nothing but Jeſus Chriſt, even him who "was crucified."

After having thus briefly ſtated the plain and ſimple doctrine of the ſcriptures concerning the "terms of acceptance with "God," let us now enquire into that of Mr. W. which is indeed of a very different complexion. And confidently as that gentleman aſſerts it, and dangerous as he repreſents it, either to diſpute, or to miſtake, the principles he aſſumes; the fact is, that not a ſingle word, no, not even a trace, or a ſhadow of them is to be found, in the chriſtian ſcriptures.

That I may not miſrepreſent his ſentiments upon a ſubject which he regards as of the higheſt moment, let him ſpeak for himſelf. After having ſtated it, p. 117. "as a highly *dangerous* notion that ſome "chriſtians with little more than an indiſ-

"tinct

" tinct and nominal reference to him who
" bore our ſins in his own body upon the
" tree, really reſt their eternal hopes on a
" vague general perſuaſion of the unquali-
" fied mercy of the Supreme Being, or ſtill
" more erroneouſly rely in the main on
" their own negative or poſitive merits."
And having noticed with diſapprobation,
p. 119, the errors of another " claſs who
" have a ſort of general indeterminate and
" ill underſtood dependence on our bleſſed
" Saviour; but whoſe hopes appear ulti-
" mately to bottom on the perſuaſion that
" they are now through Chriſt become
" members of a new diſpenſation, wherein
" they will be tried by a more lenient rule
" than that to which they muſt have been
" otherwiſe ſubject," he repreſents theſe
errors, p. 121. " as naturally reſulting
" from the miſtaken conception entertain-
" ed of the fundamental principles of chriſ-
" tianity, as a ſcheme for juſtifying the
" ungodly, and for making the *fruits of*
" *holineſs* the *effects*, not the *cauſe*, of our
" being juſtified and reconciled." Among
the practical conſequences of theſe errors,

he

he mentions, (p. 123) " their tendency to " prevent that deep feeling of gratitude for " the *merits* and *interceſion* of Chriſt, to " which we are *wholly* indebted for our re- " conciliation to God: and for the will and " the power, from firſt to laſt, to work out " our own ſalvation—their proneneſs to run " into merely moral diſquiſitions, and their " adviſing men to amend their ways as a " preparation for their coming to Chriſt, " rather than exhort them to throw them- " ſelves with deep proſtration of ſoul at the " foot of the croſs." Profeſsing, p. 127. " not to enter into the niceties of contro- " verſy," he nevertheleſs contends, " that " they who in the main believe the doc- " trines of the church of England, are " bound to allow, that our dependence on " our bleſſed Saviour as *alone* the meritori- " ous cauſe of our acceptance with God, " muſt be not merely formal and nominal, " but real and ſubſtantial. Repentance " towards God, and faith towards our Lord " Jeſus Chriſt, was the ſum of the apoſto- " lical inſtructions." This faith imports, p. 128. that " we muſt be deeply con-

" ſcious

" ſcious of our guilt and miſery, and peni-
" tently fleeing for refuge to the hope ſet
" before us; we muſt found *altogether* on
" the *merit* of the crucified Redeemer, our
" hopes of eſcape from deſerved puniſh-
" ment, and of deliverance from the en-
" ſlaving power of ſin. This muſt be our
" firſt, our laſt, our only plea. We are to
" ſurrender ourſelves up to him, to be waſh-
" ed in his blood, to be ſanctified by his
" ſpirit," and the like.

He adds, p. 129. that " what has been
" required is not the perception of a ſub-
" tle diſtinction, but a ſtate and condition
" of heart," and proceeds, p. 130. to addreſs thoſe " who are diſpoſed to believe
" that though in ſome obſcure and vague
" ſenſe, the death of Chriſt as the *ſatisfac-*
" *tion* for our ſins, and for the *purchaſe* of
" our future happineſs, and the ſanctifying
" influence of the ſpirit, are to be admit-
" ted as fundamental articles of our creed;
" yet that theſe are doctrines ſo much
" above us that they are not ſuited to our
" capacities, and that turning our eyes
" from theſe difficult ſpeculations we ſhould
" fix

" fix them on the practical and moral pre-
" cepts of the gospel." To this objection Mr. W. replies, p. 131. that " this may " not be inconsistently the language of the " modern unitarian, but surely it is in the " highest degree unreasonable to admit " into our scheme, all the *grand peculiarities* " of christianity, and, having admitted, to " neglect, and think no more of them," that " common sense suggests from their " nature and magnitude, that they deserve " our most serious regard," that " the pro-" phane irreverence of this conduct, is not " more striking than its ingratitude," " and " that we are forewarned, p. 133. that " God will not hold them guiltless who are " unmindful of his kindness." The section concludes with an exhortation to exercise those regards to Christ, which correspond with the views which the author has given of the means of salvation by him.

If then I rightly understand Mr. W.'s meaning in stating the terms of our acceptance with God, he includes two particulars; first, that the merits of Christ are an atonement, and satisfaction to divine justice for

the ſins of men, and are alone the meritorious cauſe of our acceptance with God; and ſecondly, that it is *neceſſary to ſalvation* that men ſhould be appriſed of this doctrine, and that rejecting all reliance on their own negative or poſitive merits, they ſhould found altogether on the merit of the crucified Redeemer, their hopes of eſcape from deſerved puniſhment.

Now if theſe be really the terms of ſalvation, it is natural to expect that they would be as diſtinctly ſtated, and as clearly defined, in the chriſtian ſcriptures, as in Mr. W's "Practical View." Surely, every page would be filled with exhortations, "to caſt ourſelves "at the foot of the croſs," to "rely upon the "merits of Chriſt," and "to place our con-"fidence in the atonement and ſatisfaction "of the crucified Redeemer." What then muſt be the aſtoniſhment of a ſerious enquirer, who, having formed his ideas of the chriſtian religion from Mr. W.'s treatiſe, when he came to the peruſal of the genuine writings of the apoſtles and evangeliſts, ſhould diſcover that "the merits of Chriſt," is a phraſe which no where occurs in them;

them;* that the death of Jeſus is never repreſented, either as an "atonement for ſin," or a "ſatisfaction to the Deity," whatever may be meant by thoſe obſcure, and unſcriptural expreſsions; and that we are never exhorted to aſk any thing of God "for the ſake "of Chriſt," nor is any bleſsing ever ſaid to be granted to us upon that conſideration †. That to "caſt ourſelves with deep proſtration of ſoul at the foot of the croſs," which Mr. W. ſets forth as an eſſential duty, is not once recommended in the whole New Teſtament; and that no proof can be produced, that

* N. B. The "righteouſneſs of Chriſt" is an expreſſion uſed in the epiſtle to the Romans: it ſhould be rendered juſtification, and ſignifies the introducing unbelieving jews, or idolatrous heathens, into the privileges of the goſpel. See Locke's Commentary, and Taylor's Key. The imputation of the righteouſneſs of one perſon to ſupply the defects of another, is one of thoſe extravagant ideas which never occurred to the writers of the New Teſtament.

† Eph. iv. 32, may perhaps be regarded as an exception; but that is an acknowledged mis-tranſlation. The true rendering is, even as God in or by Chriſt, hath freely forgiven you; that is, has declared by Chriſt that you are freely forgiven.

faith

faith in Chriſt means any thing more than "an habitual and practical recognition of "his authority;" much leſs, that it includes "an entire reliance on his merit." Upon all theſe ſubjects, it is ſufficient to ſay, that the ſcripture is *totally* ſilent; Mr. W. himſelf, will not pretend that the language he uſes is that of the New Teſtament. What then is the juſt and inevitable concluſion? Surely, that theſe indiſpenſible terms of acceptance, theſe "*grand pecu*-"*liarities*" of the goſpel, are mere human inventions, and not the doctrines of Chriſt.

It may perhaps be ſaid, that although the ſcriptures uſe not theſe very words, the ſame meaning may be conveyed in different language: but ſurely it is ſomewhat extraordinary that an unſcriptural phraſeology muſt be invented to expreſs the moſt eſſential ſcripture doctrines, the "grand peculiari-"ties" of chriſtianity. This at leaſt fixes a mark of ſuſpicion upon ſuch aſſumed principles; but the truth is, that the ideas correſponding to theſe novel phraſes, are no

more to be found in the ſacred writings than the phraſes themſelves, nor had they any exiſtence till ſome centuries after the apoſtolic age.*

If we aſk for proof, Mr. W. though he delivers his ſentiments with the confidence of an oracle, and denounces the vengeance of heaven on all who do not yield implicit credit to them, declines "entering into the niceties "of controverſy." Here and there indeed he thruſts in a text which ſeldom, even in appearance, and never in its true and proper ſenſe, yields the leaſt ſupport to his notion of "an undivided faith in the Lord "Jeſus," or "an entire reliance upon his "merits and ſatisfaction."

In a note, however, p. 134, he directs the reader's attention to what he calls, "a few "leading arguments." He appeals to the expreſſions, "we preach Chriſt crucified," and the like, the meaning of which has been already explained: he argues from the inſtitution of the Lord's ſupper, which is only

* See Dr. Prieſtley's Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity.

a ſolemn

a ſolemn commemoration of an intereſting event; particularly, as in a figurative ſenſe the ſeal of that new covenant, into which God is pleaſed to enter with all who believe in the divine miſsion of Jeſus; but without any mention of, or alluſion to, atonement, ſatisfaction, or merit. He adds, "that the ſacrament of baptiſm ſhadows out "our ſouls being waſhed and purified by "the blood of Chriſt;" a mere gratuitous aſſertion,* unſupported by any proof. Alſo, that in the Epiſtle to the Romans, the apoſtle ſpeaks "with the moſt emphatical "expreſsions, of deep and bitter regret, of "ſome who went about to eſtabliſh their "own righteouſneſs, and had not ſubmitted "themſelves to the righteouſneſs of God;" which he arbitrarily applies to thoſe "who "ſatisfy themſelves with vague general "thoughts of our Saviour's mediation, and "the ſource of whoſe habitual compla-"cency is, their being tolerably well ſatis-"fied with their own characters and con-

* St. Peter, 1 Pet. iii. 21, teaches, that baptiſm is emblematical, not "of being waſhed in the blood of Chriſt," but of a good conſcience towards God.

"duct," a notion the moſt diſtant from the apoſtle's mind, and utterly inconſiſtent with his reaſoning in the context. He is there ſpeaking of the Jews, who adhered to the rites and ceremonies of phariſaic tradition, in preference to the liberal diſpenſation of the goſpel, and thereby excluded themſelves from its privileges and hopes*.

Laſtly, he appeals to the Epiſtle to the Galatians, and ſtrangely ſuppoſes, "that "the great defect of the judaizing chriſtians, "which fruſtrated the grace of God, and de- "barred them from all the benefits of the "death of Jeſus, was not *immorality*, but "their being diſpoſed to truſt in *part* for "their acceptance with God, to the moſaic "inſtitutions, *inſtead of repoſing wholly on* "*the merits of Chriſt.*" This is *making* ſcripture with a witneſs. Let Mr. W. produce, if he can, a ſingle ſentence from the writings of Paul, in which that venerable ſervant and meſſenger of Jeſus, requires a reliance, either wholly, or in part, upon the merits of Chriſt: much leſs will he be able

* See Locke and Taylor, on the paſſage.

to

to diſcover any paſſage in which the apoſtle repreſents this reliance upon another's merits as ſo eſſential to ſalvation, that, without it, no moral excellence in their own character will be available. The apoſtle's deſign, from the beginning to the end of this epiſtle, is to ſhew that men who reſted their hopes of ſalvation upon the practice of burdenſome phariſaic rites, and who impoſed them upon others, excluded themſelves from the liberal proviſions of the goſpel; which requires nothing but ſuch a faith in Chriſt and his doctrine, as will influence men to the practice of univerſal virtue.

Mr. W. p. 124, cenſures ſome whom he calls "*nominal chriſtians*," for "adviſing "ſinners to amend their ways as a prepa- "rative for their coming to Chriſt, rather "than exhort them to throw themſelves "with deep proſtration at the foot of the "croſs." He does not ſeem to have recollected that the advice of the apoſtle Peter, Acts iii. 13. to men in ſimilar circumſtances, and even to the actual murderers of Jeſus, was, "repent, and be converted, "that your ſins may be blotted out." But

perhaps St. Peter was "a nominal chriſtian," and "ignorant of the goſpel;" and truly, it is more than probable that he was totally ignorant of the goſpel of Mr. W. At any rate it is ſafer and better, in a caſe of ſuch moment, to follow the advice and example of an apoſtle, than to adopt the unſcriptural jargon of modern ſyſtems, which, whatever appearance of humility and ſanctity it may aſſume, when it is thoroughly examined, will be found to convey as little meaning as "the ſounding braſs, or the tinkling cymbal."

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

Strictneſs of practical Chriſtianity. Rational Religion not unfavourable to Virtue. Obſervations on Chriſtian Idolatry.

MADAM,

I SO much approve of the general ſtrain of what Mr. Wilberforce advances upon "the ſtrictneſs of true practical chriſti-"anity," in the firſt ſection of his fourth chapter, that I am ſorry to meet with any thing from which I am obliged to diſſent, and ſtill more that any remarks ſhould have eſcaped from his pen, which are open to juſt animadverſion.

I entirely agree with Mr. W. p. 147. "That it is the grand eſſential practical cha-"racteriſtic of true chriſtians, that they "have renounced and abjured all other "maſters, and have cordially and unre-"ſervedly devoted themſelves to God;" That this, p. 148. "muſt be the maſter principle "to which every other muſt be ſubordinate;" That, "they deliberately purpoſe that ſo "far as they may be able, the grand govern-"ing

" ing maxim of their future lives ſhall be
" to do all to the glory of God;" That
p. 150. " the example of Chriſt is their
" pattern, and the word of God their rule;"
That " their determination to obey the will,
" and to cultivate the favour of God, hath
" its foundations in a deep and humiliating
" ſenſe of his exalted majeſty and infinite
" power;" but p. 151. that " theſe awful
" impreſsions are relieved and ennobled, by
" an admiring ſenſe of the infinite perfecti-
" ons, and infinite amiableneſs of the divine
" character, animated by a confiding though
" humble hope of his fatherly kindneſs and
" protection, and quickened by the grateful
" recollection of immenſe and continually in-
" creaſing obligations. This is the chriſtian
" love of God. A love compounded of ad-
" miration, of preference, of hope, of truſt,
" of joy, chaſtiſed by reverential awe, and
" wakeful with continual gratitude."

I confeſs that when I read this juſt, and animating account of the affection due from all his creatures to the Supreme Being, I can hardly believe it was written by the ſame author, who a few pages before has repre-

ſented

ſented the ſame Being as having brought his creatures into exiſtence, "radically tainted with ſin," and as having left the great majority of them to periſh, in hopeleſs, and eternal miſery. To ſuch a God as this, ſome perſons may, for aught I know, experience "a love compounded of admiration, pre-"ference, hope, truſt, and joy"—the only ſenſation that I could feel reſpecting him, if ſuch were my idea of the divine character, would be that of terror and abhorrence.

But I have no doubt that God is really worthy, in the higheſt degree, of thoſe affections which are here ſo eloquently deſcribed, for he is infinitely wiſe and good, and is incapable of acting unjuſtly by any of his creatures. "His tender mercy is over all his "works."

Our author prudently, or rather, inadvertently, declines to combine the different parts of his ſyſtem, and while he overlooks the injuſtice of leaving the great maſs of mankind to ſuffer eternal torments, he inſiſts wholly upon the goodneſs of God to the choſen few, who are regenerated by the influences of his ſpirit, and who certainly have no reaſon to complain. But the character of a Being

a Being ſo capricious and malignant, whatever partial kindneſs he may occaſionally manifeſt, can never be the object of rational veneration and confidence.

Mr. W. does not ſee this conſequence, which to many others appears ſo obvious, and palpable. Nay, he even thinks that the ſyſtem which he has ſtated lays a proper foundation for that love to God, which the goſpel requires, as the moſt powerful principle of virtue. And he very unjuſtly, and I muſt ſay uncandidly, charges chriſtians, whoſe principles do not reach his own ſtandard of orthodoxy, with a deſign to lower the ſtandard of chriſtian morality. "They" ſays he, p. 139. "who hold the fundamental doctrines of ſcripture" (that is his own unſcriptural opinions) "in their due "force, hold alſo in its due degree of purity, "the practical ſyſtem which ſcripture inculcates. But they who explain away the "former" (that is, who do not think with the author) "ſoften down the latter alſo, and "reduce it to the level of their own defective "ſcheme. It is not from any confidence in "the ſuperior amount of their own performances, or in the greater vigour of their own "exer-

" exertions, that they reconcile themſelves " to their low views of the ſatisfaction of " Chriſt, and of the influence of the ſpirit; " but it ſhould rather ſeem their plan ſo to " depreſs the required ſtandard of practice " that no man need fall ſhort of it, that no " ſuperior aid can be wanted for enabling us " to attain to it. It happens, however, with " reſpect to their ſimple method of morality, " as in the caſe of the ſhort ways to know- " ledge, of which ſome vain pretenders have " vaunted, that theſe have failed of conduct- " ing them to the right object, and have " iſſued only in ignorance and conceit."

I am ſorry to obſerve that this is a very illiberal paragraph, which I hope that Mr. W. will, upon reconſideration, retract. Let him recollect that we, who reject his pretended fundamentals as unſcriptural and untrue, have an equal right to charge him with a deſign to ſubvert the foundations of virtue, and " to *depreſs the required ſtandard of* " *practice.*" But I truſt we are too well acquainted with the ſpirit of chriſtianity to retort the charge upon our uncandid aſſailant. We can give him credit for writing from the beſt

beſt motives, and with an earneſt deſire to promote practical religion, while we think him greatly miſtaken in the means he adopts for this purpoſe. Mr. W. may be aſſured that we, who reprobate the doctrines of original depravity, of the pre-exiſtence, the Deity, and the ſatisfaction, as it is called, of Chriſt, and of the ſupernatural influences of the ſpirit, as groſs corruptions of the chriſtian religion, ſet the ſtandard of chriſtian morality as high as he himſelf can do. We contend with equal earneſtneſs for the practice of univerſal virtue, and for perfection of character: and what more can be required? It is true, that when the virtues are conſidered in detail, Mr. W. may inſiſt upon certain regards as due to Chriſt, which we may think unſcriptural and idolatrous, and may lay, what we eſteem, an undue ſtreſs upon ritual inſtitutions, but he has no more right to condemn our morality for this diverſity of opinion and practice, than a papiſt has to cenſure him, for not worſhipping the Virgin Mary, nor obſerving the feſtivals of the ſaints. And we feel ourſelves as little hurt by his unjuſt animadverſions, as he himſelf

ſelf would be by thoſe of the honeſt, but ignorant, catholic. Love is, with us, the fulfilling of the law; and the habitual practice of virtue, from a principle of love to God and benevolence to man, is, in our judgment, the ſum and ſubſtance of chriſtian morality.

The doctrine of Unitarian chriſtians, lays the beſt foundation for love to God, becauſe it repreſents the character of the Deity as perfectly wiſe, benevolent, and impartial, ever purſuing the beſt ends, the virtue and happineſs of all his intelligent offspring, by the beſt and moſt efficacious means. Hence he appears to be the proper object of complacency, gratitude, confidence, reſignation, and joy; and a ſteady faith in the exiſtence and government of ſuch a Being, is a perpetual ſource of ſatisfaction and delight, to every well diſpoſed mind. But the God of Mr. W's. ſyſtem is a gloomy and capricious tyrant, whoſe chief employment, and therefore delight, is to render his creatures miſerable. How is it then poſſible to venerate and love him?

The

The love of Chriſt, upon this ſyſtem, muſt very much interfere with the love of God. To ſay the leaſt, the idea of this ſtupendous perſon, this ſecond God, divides and diſtracts the attention, and occupies that ſpace in the mind which is the ſole property of God himſelf, the only inviſible Being, of whoſe continual preſence with us we have any ſatisfactory evidence, who is therefore the only proper object of our religious regards, and whoſe idea is at all times ſufficient to occupy and fill the mind. The notion of two infinite Beings is utterly beyond the comprehenſion of the human intellect; and indeed, as Locke and Wollaſton* have juſtly obſerved, theſe two ideas muſt neceſſarily coincide, and coaleſce into one. But the Father, and the Son, are commonly repreſented as diſtinct Beings, of different, and even oppoſite characters; the Father ſtern, ſevere, and inflexible; the Son all gentleneſs and compaſsion, ſubmitting to bear his Father's wrath, and to appeaſe his anger, by ſubſtituting himſelf in the ſtead of the

* Religion of Nature, p. 70. Locke's Fam. Letters, p. 412.

ſinner.

ſinner *. It is impoſsible to regard theſe two characters with equal affection, and the love of the imaginary Chriſt, robs the living and true God of his honour and homage.

Mr. W. obſerves, p. 156. that God "will not accept of a *divided* affection;"

* This obſervation is exemplified in the following ſtanzas from one of Dr. WATTS's hymns:—

"Once 'twas a ſeat of dreadful wrath,
"And ſhot devouring flame,
"Our God appeared conſuming fire,
"And *Vengeance* was his name.

"Rich were the drops of Jeſus' blood
"That calm'd his frowning face,
"That ſprinkled o'er the burning throne,
"And turned the wrath to grace.

"The peaceful gates of heavenly bliſs
"Are opened by the Son, &c.

How naturally and juſtly does the concluſion follow:

"To thee *ten thouſand thanks* we bring
"Great Advocate on high,
"And *glory* to the eternal King
"Who lays his *fury* by."

It is plain, that the Poet thought himſelf ten thouſand times more indebted to the Son, than to the Father. Thus it is that a phantom of the imagination uſurps the honours of the living God.

and

and again, p. 157. "idolatry is the crime "againſt which God's higheſt reſentment is "expreſſed; and his ſevereſt puniſhment "denounced." Alſo, that "It is not in "bowing the knee to idols that idolatry "conſiſts, ſo much as in the internal homage "of the heart, as in the feeling towards "them of any of that ſupreme love, or re- "verence, or gratitude, which God reſerves "to himſelf as his own excluſive prerogative. "On the ſame principle, whatever elſe "draws off the heart from him, engroſſes "our prime regard, and holds the chief "place in our eſteem and affection, that, in "the eſtimation of reaſon, is no leſs an idol "to us than an image of wood or ſtone "would be, before which we ſhould fall "down and worſhip." What then upon theſe principles muſt we ſay of that affection and regard which Mr. W. and thoſe who think with him, pay to the imaginary perſon, to whom they aſcribe the attributes of divinity, and who is, to ſuch a degree, the rival of the true and living God in their affections. Mr. W. has himſelf pronounced it to be idolatry: and according to his repreſentation of the caſe,

caſe, his own ſtate, and that of many others, would be dangerous in the extreme. But in this inſtance, he happily miſtakes the meaning of the ſcripture denunciations. The idolatry there reprobated, and againſt which the ſevereſt judgments are threatened, is the heathen idolatry, which authoriſed and often required the moſt atrocious crimes. Chriſtian idolatry *, or the worſhip of the Son and Spirit together with the Father, had not then an exiſtence: and though it is much to be cenſured and lamented, and carefully to be avoided, yet as it is not productive of ſimilar immoralities, it is not liable to the ſame condemnation. And I doubt not that the error, groſs and pernicious as it is, will in many inſtances be ſet down to the account of human frailty, and mercifully overlooked by that gracious Being, who is acquainted with the powerful influence of early prejudices and of fixed habits of thinking, over the moſt upright and ingenuous minds. While therefore I feel it to be an indiſpenſible duty to bear my public teſti-

* See Mr. LINDSEY's admirable Converſations on Chriſtian Idolatry, printed 1792; particularly the latter part of the third day's Converſation, p. 80. 87.

mony againſt the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt as diſhonourable to God, injurious to rational religion, and as in a ſtrict ſenſe *idolatrous*, I entertain a high reſpect for the piety and integrity of many of my fellow chriſtians, who, in conſequence of early and ſtrongly riveted prepoſſeſsions, conſcientiouſly practiſe it; and who no doubt think me guilty of little leſs than blaſphemy, or atheiſm in oppoſing it.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER XII.

Practice of nominal chriſtians. Theory of religious affections. The chriſtian ſabbath.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce having in the laſt ſection "endeavoured to aſcertain the eſſential character of true practical chriſtianity, proceeds, ſect. 2. to inveſtigate in "detail the practical ſyſtem of the bulk of "profeſſed chriſtians among ourſelves." And here he ſeems to have drawn a faithful portrait of many perſons, who, profeſsing to be chriſtians, complying with the external forms of religion, and abſtaining from groſs vices, flatter themſelves that they have fulfilled the requiſitions of the chriſtian law, while their hearts are devoted to "the love of eaſe, of diſsipation, of pleaſure, of pomp and parade, of wealth and "ambition, of the pleaſures of taſte and "imagination, of ſcience and literature, of "reputation," and the like. And where

any of theſe are made the primary object of purſuit, in preference to the love of God and the practice of duty, it muſt be allowed that the character falls ſhort of the ſtandard of the goſpel. It is alſo much to be feared that a great part of the chriſtian world come under this deſcription, and that many are in circumſtances of extreme danger who flatter themſelves that they are perfectly ſecure. Indeed, conſidering the influence of ſelf-love, and the dangerous conſequences of ſelf-deception, it is the part of true wiſdom to be always vigilant, and to admit no principle of action which will not bear the ſevereſt examination. Chriſtianity ſuffers not its profeſſors to reſt ſatisfied in any thing ſhort of perfection of character, and he is certainly not a real chriſtian, who does not aſpire after it.

It is however wiſe to guard againſt ſuperſtitious fears. We think moſt rationally of God when we view him under the relation of a Father, whoſe ſole deſign is the welfare of his offspring, and who impoſes no hard and unreaſonable ſervice. We cannot injure his character more than by conceiving

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ing of him as an auſtere and rigorous maſter, continually laying ſnares to entangle his ſervants, and ever on the watch to puniſh with undue ſeverity, the leaſt deviation from duty. We are ſure that we pleaſe him beſt, when our conduct is moſt conducive to our own, and others happineſs. And if this be our habitual character, we need be under no apprehenſion with reſpect to our final acceptance.

In a true chriſtian the love of God and devotedneſs to him, is the governing principle of action. But we cannot always be expreſsly thinking of God; and a virtuous man is performing his duty to the Supreme Being, as really, and as acceptably, when he is purſuing the proper buſineſs of life, or even when enjoying its innocent and decent amuſements, as when he is offering direct addreſſes to him, in the cloſet, or in the temple *.

The obſervation, p. 191. that "heavenly things are ſtated in ſcripture as

* For God is paid when man receives:
To enjoy is to obey. POPE.

" recommending themſelves to the feelings " of the true chriſtian, by being ſuited to " the renewed diſpoſitions of his heart," is the language of the theory which repreſents religion as the " ſupernatural implan- " tation of a new principle," p. 162. The truth is, that religion conſiſts, as the author himſelf elſewhere obſerves, p. 184. in " habits of mind." And there is no reaſon to think that religious habits are formed differently from other habits, which are known to be the reſult of frequent acts. A habit of devotion is neither inſtinctive nor ſupernaturally infuſed; it is generated by frequent exerciſes of religious worſhip and contemplation; and a habit of doing good, by acts of beneficence.

Many writers upon morals, and amongſt them our author, expreſs themſelves inaccurately concerning the love of virtue; as though virtue could have no exiſtence where it is not practiſed for its own ſake. This is tantamount to affirming that virtue cannot exiſt but in its moſt perfect ſtate. Virtue muſt always be approved by the underſtanding, but the practice of it

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is not always originally pleaſing. A vicious man begins to forſake his criminal courſes from a conviction of their folly and danger. He enters upon the path of virtue from a ſenſe of duty or of intereſt, not without ſome degree of reluctance. By degrees difficulties ſubſide, and uneaſineſſes vaniſh. That which was originally indifferent, or diſagreeable, becomes tolerable and pleaſant; he begins to love virtue for its own ſake, and purſues the path of rectitude, not ſo much on account of the end to which it leads, as for the pleaſure he finds in it. The beginnings of virtue are often painful, eſpecially when habits of vice have been previouſly contracted. And it is neither juſt nor wiſe to maintain that there can be no virtue without a diſintereſted love of it. It tends to diſcourage attempts at reformation in thoſe who are deſirous of forſaking their vices, and of becoming truly virtuous and religious. This may be a conſideration of little weight in the eſtimation of perſons who expect no change of character without an "*original*" ſupernatural impulſe. But they who look only to the operation of

natural and moral cauſes, for natural and moral effects, will rather chuſe to repreſent abſtinence from vice, from a ſenſe of duty and intereſt, as a conſiderable advance towards a virtuous character; and the love of virtue, though not at firſt perceptible, as gradually growing from the habitual practice of it.

"Let no man judge you," ſays the apoſtle, Col. ii. 16. "in reſpect to the ſabbath "day," i. e. regard no man's cenſure for not obſerving the ſabbath. "One man," ſays the ſame authoriſed teacher, Rom. xiv. 5. "eſteemeth one day above another; another "eſteemeth every day alike. Let every man "be fully perſuaded in his own mind," or as Dr. Doddridge renders it, "let every man "freely enjoy his own ſentiment." Such is the apoſtolic canon; and the ground of it is, that chriſtians who differed in theſe points were equally influenced by the ſame principle, viz. regard to the authority of Chriſt; and therefore were equally acceptable to God. "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to "the Lord, and he that diſregardeth the day, "diſregardeth it to the Lord."

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This is the deciſion of St. Paul; how different from that of Mr. W. who, p. 193. in contradiction to the apoſtle's rule, directs men to judge of their ſincerity and proficiency in religion, by the pleaſure they take in the ſabbatical obſervance of the firſt day of the week, and who pronounces, p. 199. a ſevere ſentence upon thoſe who do not think it neceſſary to obſerve the Sunday, with that ſtrictneſs, and ſeverity, which, neither Jeſus, nor his apoſtles, but a miſtaken ſpirit of devotion, has impoſed, and with which, it tells us "we ought to be delighted." "All theſe artifices," ſays Mr. W. p. 198. (referring particularly to family parties, where neither muſic nor cards are introduced) "whatever they may be, to unhal-
"low the Sunday, and to change its cha-
"racter, it might be almoſt ſaid to relax
"its horrors, prove but too plainly that the
"worſhip of God is with us a conſtrained,
"and not a willing ſervice, which we are glad
"therefore to abridge, though we dare not
"omit it." He adds, concerning the ſame deſcription of perſons, that is, thoſe who do not approve and take pleaſure in that rigid obſervation

vation of the day which he is pleaſed to preſcribe, " that ſuch perſons voluntarily acquieſce in a ſtate of mind which is directly " contrary to the poſitive commands of God, " which forms a perfect contraſt to the repreſentations given us in ſcripture of the " chriſtian character, and accords but too " faithfully in one leading feature with the " character of thoſe, who are ſtated to be " the objects of divine diſpleaſure in this life, " and of divine puniſhment in the next."

Such is the uncharitable cenſure of Mr. W. in a caſe which St. Paul having explicitly ſtated, has clearly decided that every one ſhould freely enjoy his own opinion. And ſuch is the narrow ſpirit univerſally generated, where will-worſhip, and ritual obſervances, are ſet upon a level with practical religion, or ſubſtituted in its place. Warned by the apoſtle, I preſume not to condemn any man for his ſabbatical obſervation of the firſt day of the week. But zealous for the liberty with which Chriſt hath made us free, and regarding (as the apoſtle recommends*) no man's cenſures

* See p. 136.

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for not obſerving the ſabbath day, I have no heſitation in aſſerting that under the chriſtian diſpenſation, "every day is alike." Of public worſhip I am a ſincere advocate; and it having been the uniform practice of the chriſtian church, to aſſemble for this purpoſe on the firſt day of the week, I highly approve of the continuance of this laudable and uſeful cuſtom. But that under the chriſtian diſpenſation one day is more holy than another *, or that any employment, or any amuſement, which is lawful on other days, is unlawful on the Sunday, can never be proved either from the chriſtian ſcriptures, or from eccleſiaſtical antiquity. Nor is it neceſſary. The chriſtian law expreſsly requires not that a ſeventh part only, but that the whole of our time, and every action of life, ſhould be devoted to the ſervice of God, and that "whether we "eat or drink, or whatever we do, we ſhould "do all to his glory." So that to a true chriſ-

* See upon this ſubject the controverſy between Mr. Evanſon and Dr. Prieſtley, where this ſubject is fully diſcuſſed, and brought to a proper iſſue.

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tian every day is a ſabbath, and every employment is an act of devotion.

Mr. W. may perhaps not unprofitably paſs the firſt day of the week in the manner which he has preſcribed; but every body cannot do it. The mind grows weary by conſtant attention to intellectual objects, and requires relaxation on the Sunday, as well as on other days. And to the generality of chriſtians, ſincere as well as nominal, who cannot keep up their attention to religion through the whole day, and are ſuperſtitiouſly fearful of diverting their thoughts to any other ſubject, "the Sunday is, to ſay "the beſt of it, p. 196. a heavy day, "and that larger part of it which is not "claimed by the public offices of the "church, dully draws on in comfortleſs "vacuity," as many have experienced whoſe moral character is in no reſpect inferior to theirs, whoſe minds are capable of a greater intenſity of application, and their paſsions of being kept longer in a ſtate of religious effervescence.

That the laws of any country ſhould enjoin a ſabbatiſm which God has not required, appears

appears to me unreaſonable and unjuſt. How far it may be prudent or decent to "violate ſuch laws" when made, is a different queſtion; but Mr. W. has no right to repreſent a neglect of ſuch arbitrary human inſtitutions as "an inſult upon religion." p. 196.

This ſabbatical ſpirit, and theſe ritual practices are very improperly, and unwarrantably repreſented, p. 199. as "eſſential "conſtituents of a devotional frame:" This is another inſtance of that narrow and cenſorious ſpirit which is generated by too great an attachment to the forms of religion. A man who goes to church four times a day, commonly thinks himſelf a better chriſtian than he, who is contented with three ſervices only; who in his turn triumphs in his ſpiritual ſuperiority over the man that ſatisfies himſelf with two. While the latter, if not more than uſually charitable, regards his chriſtian brother who goes but once, as little better than a heathen.

It is obvious, that laying an undue ſtreſs upon the obſervation of the ſabbath, natu-

rally tends to introduce the ſpirit which in the beginning of the ſection I have now reviewed, is ſo juſtly condemned. Perſons who are ſo very religious on a Sunday, are too apt to lay aſide religion for the reſt of the week. They often put it off with their Sunday clothes. They " have paid " their tithes, p. 163. ſay rather their " compoſition, the demands of the church " are ſatisfied, and they may ſurely be per- " mitted to enjoy what ſhe has left, without " moleſtation or interference,"

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XIII.

Concerning the desire of applause, and whether amiable tempers and useful lives constitute the whole of religion.

MADAM,

I Much approve of what Mr. Wilberforce has advanced, sect. 3. "upon the desire of "human estimation and applause," a subject which he has treated with judgment and eloquence, and which he has well discussed both as a philosopher, and as a christian. Nothing is more grateful to an ingenuous mind than the approbation of the wise and good, when it comes unsought for, in the upright, and disinterested discharge of duty. But applause ought never to be made explicitly, much less primarily, the object of pursuit. The desire of applause not only vitiates the motive, but usually defeats its own end; for praise is invariably withheld whenever the love of praise appears to be the predominant principle; and the only just

juſt and indeed the moſt effectual way to attain a good reputation, is to deſerve it.

In religion eſpecially, the opinion of the world is the laſt conſideration which ought to influence the mind. No man is worthy of the name of chriſtian, much leſs can he attain to any honourable diſtinction in his profeſsion, if he is not prepared fearleſsly to ſeek after, and avow chriſtian truth, and to live in the habitual diſcharge of chriſtian duty, equally unmoved by the profane ſcorn of ſome, and the bitter, and unfounded cenſures of others. "Never to be aſhamed of "Chriſt and of his words," is a principle which muſt be deeply engraven on the hearts of all, who are ambitious of the character, of his genuine and approved diſciples.

Mr. W. in his next ſection, p. 246. profeſſes to "ſtate and confute the generally "prevailing error of ſubſtituting amiable "tempers and uſeful lives in the place of "religion;" and he introduces many good remarks, blended however with ſome inaccuracies ariſing from his inattention to the origin and progreſs of the affections.

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He begins with obſerving, that "the "error in queſtion is that of exaggerating "the merit of certain amiable and uſeful "qualities, and of conſidering them as of "themſelves ſufficient to compenſate for "the want of the ſupreme love and fear of "God." He ſtates with great propriety and impartiality, "the common language "upon this head," p. 247. He remarks, p. 248. "that a fatal diſtinction is thus "admitted between morality and religion," which he calls "a great and deſperate "error." He argues, p. 249. "that the "moral worth of theſe benevolent tempers "and uſeful lives, is apt to be greatly over-"rated." He obſerves, that "there are "many falſe pretenders to theſe amiable "qualities;" and maintains, p. 250. that "when the benevolent qualities are genuine, "they often deſerve the name rather of "amiable inſtincts than moral virtues;" and again, p. 251. that "when they are not "grounded and rooted in religion, their "duration is ſhort and precarious," and "that "they often terminate in cruelty and mi-"ſanthropy," p. 254. He gives little

credit p. 255. "for intrinſic worth to uſe-
"ful lives, independent of religious prin-
"ciples." He obſerves, p. 256. that theſe qualities, however excellent, "could in no "degree be admitted as a compenſation for "the want of the ſupreme fear and love of "God;" nor p. 258. "can it by any "means be allowed that in performing their "duties towards their fellow-creatures, they "perform thoſe to God virtually and ſub-"ſtantially, if not in name." That theſe qualities, p. 261. "ſo far from being per-"fect in their nature, are radically defec-"tive and corrupt, that no practice will be "admitted as chriſtian, but that which "flows from chriſtian principles;" and that the true chriſtian, p. 263. is "really the "moſt amiable and uſeful character." He adminiſters, p. 265. very ſuitable admoni-tions to chriſtians upon theſe heads, both to the "naturally ſweet tempered and ac-"tive," p. 266. and "to the naturally "rough and auſtere," p. 267. and ſug-"geſts excellent advice to the latter, p. 270. "for acquiring a gentle and benevo-"lent ſpirit." Mr. W. farther remarks

p. 272.

p. 272. "that perſons of amiable tempers "and uſeful lives, have indeed their reward, "being always beloved in private, and ge-"nerally reſpected in public life. But "when devoid of religion, if the word of "God be not a fable, they cannot enter "into the kingdom of heaven." He afterwards proceeds p. 274. to warn chriſtians "of the danger to which they are expoſed "of inſenſibly loſing in the buſineſs and "buſtle of the world, the right principles "with which they ſet out, and their reliſh "for the employments and offices of reli-"gion;" and he concludes his ſection, with "offering advice," in the main, juſt and uſeful to ſuch "as ſuſpect this to be their "caſe;" adding ſome proper animadverſion upon the principles of Rouſſeau, and Sterne. p. 282.

Not being an advocate for the doctrine of inſtinctive principles, I can by no means coincide in the declaration, p. 250. "that "where the benevolent qualities are ge-"nuine, they often deſerve the name ra-"ther of amiable inſtincts than moral vir-"tues." Leaſt of all can I admit, that "the

" qualities under conſideration, are radically " defective and corrupt, that they are a " body without a ſoul." This aſſertion originates in the erroneous opinion, that human nature is "radically tainted with ſin," and is as unfounded as the doctrine upon which it reſts. Benevolence is generated like every other affection, by the circumſtances in which men are placed, and the impreſsions to which they are expoſed. No man is benevolent by inſtinct, any more than he is by inſtinct a muſician, a philoſopher, or a ſcholar.

Alſo, benevolence, in whatever way acquired, is a moral excellence. It is not eſſential to moral rectitude that there ſhould be a mental conflict, or previous diſcipline; otherwiſe, it could not be an attribute of Deity. The virtue of an affection conſiſts wholly in its beneficial tendency, and benevolence is as much a moral excellence in the Supreme Being, in whom it exiſts by neceſsity,* as it is in man, in whom it is

* If angels are what they are generally ſuppoſed to be, their virtues muſt be inſtinctive; but are they not therefore moral qualities?

the effect of mental diſcipline. Hence it follows, that if it were even inſtinctive, it would not on that account be leſs virtuous: and if benevolence could exiſt, as pure, fixed, and efficacious, without religion as with it, its moral value would be the ſame. But the truth is, that in the preſent ſtate of things, benevolence meets with ſo many powerful checks, that the principles of religion are its only effectual ſupport, and nothing but a ſtrong ſenſe of duty to God, will induce men to perſevere in doing good to their fellow creatures, in oppoſition to ingratitude, calumny, diſappointment, and other conſiderations, which diſcourage, and overrule that benevolence which is not founded upon piety, and often, as is juſtly obſerved, p. 254. "convert a generous, and beneficent "youth, as he advances in life, into a hard, "and cruel tyrant, or into a cold, ſour, "and ſilent miſanthrope."

It is, however, perfectly true, p. 257. "that benevolence, and uſefulneſs, can in no "degree be admitted as a compenſation for "the want of the ſupreme love and fear of "God, and that religion ſuffers not any

"ſuch compoſition of duties." It is eſſential to the perfect happineſs of man, that he ſhould entertain right ſentiments of his Maker, and right affections towards him; without which, he will ſeldom feel motives ſufficiently powerful to produce the uniform practice of the ſocial, and perſonal virtues. But whatever virtues may adorn the mind, ſo long as the love of God is abſent, the character is deficient in its moſt eſſential excellence, and happineſs muſt be proportionably incomplete.

What puniſhment may await thoſe, if any ſuch there be, who being perfect in the duties of benevolence and ſelf government, are deſtitute of right affections to the Supreme Being, it is difficult to aſcertain. Mr. W. himſelf, expreſſes his ſentiments upon this ſubject with more than uſual caution; p. 272. "if the word of God be not a fable, "they cannot enter into the kingdom of hea-"ven." One thing is certain. Before ſuch perſons can be finally happy, they muſt undergo that diſcipline, whatever it be, which may be neceſſary to generate ſupreme love

to

to God, and entire devotedneſs to his will. At any rate, it is the wiſdom of all to uſe their utmoſt endeavours to combine godlineſs, with brotherly kindneſs, and charity, that they may not be wanting in any of thoſe qualifications, which the goſpel requires as eſſential to an intereſt in its bleſſings.

In p. 267. we find ſome excellent directions for thoſe, who "are conſcious that "they are naturally rough, and auſtere." Amongſt other things, they are adviſed "to "force themſelves to abound in offices "of courteſy and kindneſs." This is the true way of producing the habit of benevolence; and they who act thus from a ſenſe of duty to God, are acting a wiſe and virtuous part, and with ſteady perſeverance, they ſhall eventually ſucceed. Mr. W. ſurely muſt have forgotten himſelf, when p. 263. he repreſents certain actions which flow, as he expreſſes it, "from a cold ſenſe "of duty," as "robbed of their vital "ſpirit, and thereby ſo debaſed and de-"graded in our eſtimation, as to become "not barely lifeleſs and unintereſting, but

" even diſtaſteful and loathſome." Before moral affections are generated in the mind, the ſenſe of duty is the only efficacious ſtimulus to thoſe actions, which will in the end produce the moral habit. It muſt be allowed, that actions ſo circumſtanced, indicate imperfection in the agent, and are not ſo intrinſically excellent, as when they proceed from a fixed principle of diſintereſted virtue. But ſurely it is going much too far to affirm that actions " flowing from a ſenſe " of duty are degraded, diſtaſteful, and " loathſome."

The language is certainly incorrect; and the author cannot mean what his words ſeem to expreſs.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XIV.

Obſervations upon what Mr. W. calls other grand defects in the practical ſyſtem of nominal chriſtians.

MADAM,

IN his ſucceeding ſection, p. 285. Mr. Wilberforce animadverts upon "ſome other grand "defects in the practical ſyſtem of the bulk "of nominal chriſtians." Thoſe which he here ſpecifies are "the inadequate ideas "which they entertain of the guilt and evil "of ſin," "their inadequate fear of God," "their inadequate ſenſe of the difficulty of "getting to heaven," "their allowed defect-"iveneſs in the love of God," and likewiſe "in what regards the love of their "fellow creatures."

This ſection contains many excellent obſervations, that merit the ſerious attention of all ſincere profeſſors of religion. The ſtandard of chriſtian morals is indeed ſet ſo high that few can hope to reach it: but I do not know that it ought on that account to be diſapproved. When we conſider what reaſon,

ſon, and revelation both, require as eſſential to perfection, and conſequently to happineſs, and compare the ſtandard with the actually exiſting human character, it may juſtly excite alarming apprehenſions in the minds, even of the moſt virtuous men. The moſt enlarged charity can hardly expect the *immediate* ſalvation of the great maſs of mankind, and men whoſe characters approach the neareſt to perfection, can ſeldom attain more than a chearful preponderant hope, not unalloyed with ſome anxious fear: and perhaps this may be the beſt, and moſt uſeful ſtate of mind, to frail and erring creatures, in a courſe of probation. In this ſtate of things, nothing affords greater relief than the hope which philoſophy, enlightened by revelation, affords, of an ultimate purification and renovation of all things. The doctrine of the future annihilation of the great majority of mankind, and much more of their eternal torment, is ſuch, as muſt overcaſt a benevolent and feeling mind, with deep and habitual gloom.

To prove that " the bulk of nominal " chriſtians have a moſt inadequate idea of

" the guilt and evil of ſin," it is alledged p. 286. that " the guilt of actions is eſti-" mated not by the proportion in which " according to ſcripture they are offenſive " to God; but by that in which they are " injurious to ſociety." Men in a ſocial ſtate, naturally animadvert with the greateſt ſeverity, upon thoſe vices which are moſt immediately injurious to them, and which tend to the diſſolution of ſociety itſelf. Hence they acquire a habit, I will not ſay, of over-rating the ſocial virtues, but rather of under-rating the reſt. It is indeed too obvious that piety and ſelf government, in other words the divine and perſonal virtues, are of little value in the eſtimation of many who call themſelves chriſtians.

It is properly remarked p. 290. that " the ſlight notions which many entertain " of the evil of ſin, diſcover an utter want " of all ſuitable reverence for the Divine " Majeſty." The fear of God is indeed " juſtly " termed in ſcripture the beginning of wiſ-" dom." It is produced, by the ſerious contemplation of the infinitude of the divine power, wiſdom,

wiſdom, and greatneſs; by the conſideration of the evils which are permitted under the divine government; by the experience of ſufferings; by the denunciations of ſcripture; and the conſcioufneſs of guilt.

This principle, alone, would overwhelm the mind, and produce continual dejection, if it were not blended and tempered, with chearful confidence in the infinite goodneſs of God, which ſoftens it down to that reverential awe of the divine majeſty, which is the greateſt reſtraint upon all vicious practices and affections.

Mr. W. p. 290. repreſenting the fear of God as a principle in which "nominal "chriſtians are greatly deficient," as a proof of it mentions, "their ſlight notions "of the guilt and evil of ſin," and hence he takes occaſion to ſpeak of the juſtice of the puniſhment denounced againſt ſin as "rebellion againſt the ſovereignty of God," and obſerves that "worlds upon worlds ſur-"round us, all probably full of intelligent "creatures, to whom, now, or hereafter, "we may be a ſpectacle, and afford an ex-"ample of the divine procedure." But this

this is a conſideration wholly imaginary, and therefore unworthy of notice in a diſcuſſion of ſuch high importance. It is enough that God has declared, and that the reaſon of the thing demonſtrates, that the wicked ſhall ſuffer adequate puniſhment.

As little occaſion is there for the ſucceeding argument, from which we are told, p. 292. "that the awful denunciations of the fu-" ture puniſhment of ſin derive additional " weight," viz. that they " are repreſent-" ed as reſulting from certain connexions " and relations, which render them ſuitable " and becoming." This is explained by remarking that " the righteous belong to " the kingdom of God, and the wicked " to the kingdom of Satan, they are his " children, his ſervants, they do his works, " and at length ſhall partake his portion, " when the merciful Saviour ſhall be changed " into an avenging Judge, and ſhall pro-" nounce that dreadful ſentence, depart " from me ye curſed into everlaſting fire " prepared for the Devil and his angels."

The Devil or Satan not being a real, but an allegorical, or mythological perſon, the puniſhment

puniſhment of the wicked cannot, in ſtrict propriety, be owing to the relation in which they ſtand to him, but they ſuffer juſtly in conſequence of thoſe vices, by which they are figuratively claſſed amongſt the ſubjects of that allegorical Being, who is repreſented as ſharing with the Deity in the government of the world, and whoſe empire comprehends the unbelieving, and the vicious portion of the human race.

Mr. W. in diſcourſing p. 214. upon "the "inadequate conception of the difficulty of "becoming true chriſtians," remarks, that "the general notion appears to be, that we "are *born* chriſtians. We do not therefore "look out for poſitive evidence of our really "being of that number; but putting the "*onus probandi* on the wrong ſide, we con-"ceive ourſelves ſuch of *courſe*, except our "title be diſproved by poſitive evidence to "the contrary."

That we are born chriſtians, is a poſition as erroneous, as that we are born ſinners. But it may be truly affirmed of perſons who have been educated in chriſtian principles, and virtuous habits, that "they are chriſtians "of

" of courſe till their title be diſproved by " poſitive evidence to the contrary," that is, till they have contracted habits of *vice*, from which many have all their life time been preſerved, who have had the happineſs of being placed in circumſtances favourable to moral improvement, and in which, they have not been expoſed to temptations beyond their ſtrength.

It is obſerved p. 298. that " in the lan- " guage of ſcripture chriſtianity is not a " geographical but a moral term. It is the " poſſeſsion of a *peculiar nature*, with the " qualities and properties which belong to " it. It is a ſtate into which we are not " *born*, but into which we muſt be *tranſlated*, " a nature which we do not *inherit*, but into " which we are to be *created* anew."

The Creator is here repreſented, as uſual, as having placed his human offspring in circumſtances the moſt deplorable, from which they cannot eſcape but by a new creation, and the attainment of a new nature. For this it is added, " we muſt be indebted to " the undeſerved grace of God which is " promiſed to our uſe of the appointed " means."

"means." But of what avail is this promiſe, ſince we are naturally unable to make uſe of the means preſcribed? And where is the grace, or even the juſtice, of firſt placing men in a ſtate in which they are utterly incapable of every virtuous exertion, and then requiring ſuch exertions, and promiſing aſſiſtance to them? It is amazing that a perſon of Mr. W.'s underſtanding, can be ſatisfied with ſuch groſs miſrepreſentations of the Divine character, which cannot but excite the grief and indignation of every well-informed, and well-diſpoſed mind.

Nor can it by any means be admitted that "Chriſtianity is the poſſeſſion of a peculiar "nature, with the qualities and properties "which belong to it." True chriſtianity is no ſuch thing. It is a ſyſtem of habits and affections, generated by a correſpondent mental diſcipline. And thoſe myſtical repreſentations of religion, which lead men to expect a ſupernatural change of the principles and affections, as they are inconſiſtent with true philoſophy, and unfounded in genuine chriſtianity, ſo they are alſo unfavourable to good morals, as they encourage enthu-

enthuſiaſm, and lead men to judge of their ſtate from certain inexplicable feelings, and rapturous emotions, rather than from habit and character, which tends to puff up with vanity men of little knowledge, and warm paſſions, while it diſcourages the truly virtuous, humble, and ſincere.

We are told, p. 303, "that the bulk of "nominal chriſtians are defective in the "love of God." Reaſon and philoſophy, do indeed teach us to think of God, with complacency, and gratitude. And why? Becauſe he is the moſt amiable of all beings, continually doing us good, and intending our ultimate happineſs, and that of all rational creatures. The ſcriptures alſo, require us to love God, with all our underſtandings, and with all our hearts, for "God "is Love." Mr. W. juſtly repreſents love to God, as "a great conſtituent in a true "chriſtian character;" and expreſſes ſtrong diſapprobation of the "dull artificial heart-"leſs gratitude" of nominal chriſtians. But what is the God of Mr. W.'s ſyſtem? A Being who firſt forms his creatures with a nature radically depraved, and

then condemns the majority of them to eternal miſery, for being what he himſelf made them. Can it be ſurprizing that ſuch a God as this, is not the object of love?

It is juſtly obſerved, p. 306. that "the "generous principle of love ſcorns the "refuge of caſuiſtry, and that the leaſt "hint, the ſlighteſt ſurmiſe, is ſufficient to "make it ſtart from what is offenſive, and "fly with eagerneſs to what is gratifying, "to the object of affection." But it is likewiſe true, that a rational love to God, greatly tends to clear the mind from vain and ſuperſtitious ſcruples. "Perfect love "caſteth out fear."

An objection is here introduced by our author againſt the "lawfulneſs of theatrical amuſements," from their inconſiſtency with the love of God; and another, p. 317. from their repugnance to general benevolence: "the ſituation of the performers, particularly "of thoſe of the female ſex, being remark-"ably unfavourable to the maintenance, and "growth, of the religious and moral prin-"ciple, and of courſe highly dangerous to "their eternal intereſts."

I am

I am far from thinking that the ſtage, in its preſent ſtate, is a perfect "ſchool of "morals," and am no advocate for a frequent, promiſcuous attendance, upon theatrical amuſements. But the abuſe of any thing, is no objection againſt the prudent, and moderate uſe of it. Theatrical amuſements are not in themſelves unlawful, nor are all dramatic compoſitions of an immoral tendency. No amuſement is more innocent, or more rational, than that of a well regulated theatre. Nor have ſuch entertainments been univerſally objected to, or declined, by perſons of the greateſt reſpectability of character, who would be as far from encouraging any thing really injurious, or immoral, as thoſe who make the greateſt profeſsions of piety.

Chriſtianity regulates principles and habits, and leaves particular practices to the diſcretion of the individual. "To him who "eſteemeth any thing to be unclean, to "him it is unclean.*" For thoſe who think theatrical amuſements to be univerſally unlawful, it is beſt to abſtain from them

* Rom, xiv. 14.

altogether. But let them not be unreaſonably ſevere in their cenſures of others who have no ſcruples of this nature, and whoſe characters are in no moral view unworthy of their chriſtian profeſſion.

The objection which is urged from the moral effect of their ſituation upon the performers themſelves, is indeed very plauſible. But the argument proves too much. If nothing is to be done which is either directly, or indirectly, a means of tempting others to vice, few actions would be innocent. It is a principle, which in its utmoſt extent, would prove the unlawfulneſs of manufactures and commerce, which in many caſes that it would be eaſy to ſpecify, are by no means favourable, to the morals of the parties concerned in carrying them on. Upon the whole, therefore, the ſpecial circumſtances of each caſe muſt determine the propriety of the action, but there is no good reaſon for condemning theatrical amuſements, as univerſally inconſiſtent with the chriſtian character.

I cannot conclude this letter, without expreſsing my entire approbation of thoſe

" true

"true marks of benevolence" which Mr. W. has introduced, p. 312. &c. He here ſpeaks the language of the moſt exalted chriſtian philanthropy, and eloquently deſcribes that ſublime generoſity to which it is agreed by all chriſtians, how widely ſoever they may differ in doctrinal points, that the chriſtian religion is intended, and, by its intereſting diſcoveries calculated, to form the minds of its profeſſors. It is pleaſing to obſerve, that ſincere chriſtians of all denominations, agree in the moral purpoſe and tendency of their holy religion: and this conſideration ſhould ſoften that aſperity and rancour, with which, through the infirmity of human nature, they are too much diſpoſed to regard and to treat each other, for differences of opinion, concerning the moſt efficacious means of attaining the end, to which they unanimouſly profeſs to aſpire.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER XV.

The little practical value, of what are called, "the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity."

MADAM,

IN the five preceding ſections, I have had the pleaſure of accompanying Mr. Wilberforce through the greater part of his route, with here, and there, an occaſional deviation. I am ſorry that in the ſection which is the ſubject of this epiſtle, and in which he treats of what he calls "the grand radi-" cal defect of nominal chriſtians," namely, their neglect of, what he pronounces to be, "the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity," I am obliged to abandon him altogether. But truth calls, and her authority is paramount.

Remembering the time, when I was myſelf a ſincere believer in the ſtrange and unſcriptural doctrines, ſo eloquently recommended in this ſection, I ought to feel candour, and ſympathy, for thoſe who are ſtill under

under the ſame deluſion, and who now think, and feel, as I then thought, and felt. But I acknowledge, that according to my preſent views, it appears wonderful that prejudice ſhould ſo far miſlead the underſtanding, as to induce a man of ſenſe and integrity, to ſet down as eſſential doctrines of chriſtianity, tenets plainly repugnant both to its letter and ſpirit, and to adopt a ſtrain of language and ſentiments, which more than borders upon impiety and idolatry, and which I cannot witneſs, without a ſenſation of horror.

I muſt alſo obſerve, that as the God of this ſyſtem, is a Being of ſuch ſtern ſeverity, and indeed, malignity, it is natural for thoſe who receive it, willingly to imagine the exiſtence of a ſecond perſon, who, being inveſted with all the amiable attributes of Deity, and having alſo voluntarily ſubmitted in an incarnate form to bear the wrath of God for the benefit of believers, becomes really the object of religious complacency, gratitude, and confidence, and occupies that place in the mind which properly belongs to the one living and true God. And theſe affec-

tions to an unreal phantom, being by meditation and exercise, wrought up to a high tone, produce many of those beneficial moral effects, which would result from right views of, and affections to, the Supreme Being himself. Nevertheless, these moral sentiments being founded on fancy, are as various and capricious as fancy herself, and fall far below that dignified and manly piety, which is the natural result of proper attention to just and rational principles, and which is a permanent and active stimulus to universal virtue. In no human character, did rational devotion ever appear in a more conspicuous light, than in that of the holy and humble Jesus, who would doubtless have rejected with abhorrence, those divine honours, which his mistaken followers in later ages have ascribed to him, had they been addressed to him previous to his departure from this world.

In this section, Mr. W. first complains of the forgetfulness of, what he calls, the "peculiar doctrines of christianity;" to this he tells us, "it is owing that some men "satisfy themselves with partial reform,

" p. 320.

" p. 320. and others are tempted to de-
" ſpair, p. 322. He then deſcribes the
" advice of modern religioniſts, to ſuch as are
" deſirous of repenting, p. 324. and imme-
" diately afterwards, p. 325. the advice which
" he ſays, that the holy ſcriptures, and the
" church of England give to the ſame per-
" ſons." He then ſtates, " the diſtinction be-
" tween the true chriſtian, and all other
" religioniſts, concerning the nature of ho-
" lineſs and the way in which it is to be
" obtained," p. 326. He repreſents, " atten-
" tion to theſe doctrines as the proper
" means of growing in grace, p. 328. and
recommends, " looking to Jeſus, as that
" which beſt teaches the importance of
" chriſtianity, p. 331. which enforces the
" duty of devotedneſs to God, p. 332.
" together with the guilt of ſin, and dread
" of puniſhment, ib. which beſt promotes
" love to God, p. 334.—to Chriſt, p. 335.
" —and to our fellow-creatures, p. 336.
" which produces humility, p. 337.—
" moderation in earthly purſuits, and chear-
" fulneſs in ſuffering, p. 339.—courage
" and confidence in dangers, and heavenly-
" mind-

" mindedneſs," p. 342. and he concludes the ſection with obſerving, p. 316. " that " the place held by the (ſuppoſed) pecu- " liar doctrines of chriſtianity, conſtitutes " the grand diſtinction between nominal " and real chriſtians.

" The grand radical defect in the prac- " tical ſyſtem of nominal chriſtians, is ſaid, " p. 320. to be the forgetfulneſs of all the " peculiar doctrines of the religion they " profeſs, viz. the corruption of human na- " ture, the atonement of the Saviour, and " the ſanctifying influence of the holy ſpi- " rit," *none of which doctrines are true in fact, nor derive the leaſt countenance from the chriſtian ſcriptures. Happy had it been if they had never been invented, and thrice happy when they ſhall be totally forgotten.*

" That men who in ſickneſs form good " reſolutions, do, when they recover, " ſometimes relapſe into their old habits " of ſin," and ſometimes " take up with a " partial and ſcanty amendment," is imputed, p. 321. " to a prevailing ignorance " of the real nature of chriſtianity, and

" for-

" forgetfulneſs of its grand peculiarities," meaning thereby, the unſcriptural notions ſtated above. This ſophiſm is called by logicians, the " aſsignation of a falſe " cauſe." The fact is but too true, that many, who make good reſolutions upon a ſick bed, forget them with returning health. And this is owing in part, to the return of the uſual ſtate of the brain, and with it the uſual ſtate of mind previous to ſickneſs; ſo that the will to reform is wanting, and the virtuous diſpoſition produced by ſickneſs, vaniſhes like a dream. Alſo, where inclination remains, and the judgment continues to be convinced of the neceſsity of reformation, reſolution often fails. An undue confidence is frequently placed, in a ſuppoſed freedom of the will, which encourages a perſon to venture into circumſtances of temptation, and makes him negligent of that mental diſcipline, by the perſevering uſe of which alone, inveterate habits of vice can be eradicated, and virtuous affections ſubſtituted in their place.

Mr.

Mr. W. p. 324. "ſtates what he calls "the advice of modern Religioniſts, to ſuch "as are deſirous of repenting," viz. "Be "ſorry for your ſins; diſcontinue the prac- "tice of them; do your utmoſt; diſcharge "with fidelity the duties of your ſtations; "read ſuch books as will inſtruct you in "the principles of a chriſtian life," and the like. And truly the advice of theſe "modern "Religioniſts," appears to be very ſalutary, and no reaſonable objection could have been made to it, had it not been interlarded with the unſcriptural fictions, of the "merits of "Chriſt," and the ſupernatural "aſſiſtance "of the Holy Spirit."

Should any perſon in the circumſtances ſuppoſed, oppreſſed by the tyranny of evil habits, and ſincerely deſirous of radical reformation, or in other words, of becoming a real chriſtian, apply for advice to a judicious and well-informed inſtructor, ſuch an adviſer would perhaps ſay to the ſolicitous enquirer; It is needleſs, to pay regard to thoſe unſcriptural doctrines, which many ſo highly extol; ſuch as *original ſin*, *incarnation*, *atonement*, *plenary ſatisfaction*,

faction, merits of Chriſt, and the like; they may perplex your underſtanding, and divert your attention from uſeful truth, but they can do no good. The age of miracles is paſt. Expect no ſupernatural impreſsions upon your mind, and do not fancy, that moral and religious principles and habits, are to be acquired in a different way from other habits of mind. Do not ſtrain ſcripture metaphors, to ſenſes which their authors never intended; and imagine not, that any myſtery is contained in thoſe ſtrong expreſsions, by which the apoſtles meant nothing more than to deſcribe the great change which paſſed upon an idolatrous heathen, or a phariſaic jew, when he became a ſincere chriſtian. Diſcard myſticiſm, and do not ſuppoſe that religion is a ſtate of mind, which keeps the paſsions in conſtant agitation, and effervescence. The practice of virtue, depends infinitely more upon ſettled principles, than upon warm and tranſient feelings. Conſult the ſcriptures. "Do juſtice, love mercy, walk humbly "with God; ceaſe to do evil; learn to do "well; though your ſins are as ſcarlet, "they ſhall be whiter than ſnow; though

" red like crimſon they ſhall be as wool:
" Fear God and keep his commandments:
" Repent and be converted that your ſins
" may be blotted out: Love God with all
" your underſtanding, and with all your
" heart, and your neighbour as yourſelf."
What can be more intelligible, or more rational, than ſuch directions as theſe?

To excite you to an habitual, practical regard to them, fix in your mind, juſt and honourable ſentiments of God, as the greateſt, wiſeſt and beſt of Beings, who cannot act unjuſtly by any of his creatures, whoſe fixed purpoſe it is to make them happy; and who permits the exiſtence of no evil, natural or moral, but what is neceſſary to accompliſh this end. Remember that the very definition of virtue is, a courſe of conduct leading to the greateſt ultimate happineſs;—of vice, that which leads to miſery. You are deficient in virtuous habits, you wiſh to form them; you have contracted vicious affections, you wiſh to exterminate them.

Men are the creatures of circumſtances: and habits grow, or fade, by the influence of correſponding impreſsions, with the ſame regularity,

regularity, and certainty, with which the fruits of the earth are produced, and matured, by the genial influence of the ſun, and of the fructifying ſhowers; or blighted, by the lightening and the mildew. You know the circumſtances, in which your vicious habits were originally contracted, and by which they have been confirmed. Avoid theſe circumſtances, and give the mind a contrary bias. You know what impreſsions will produce juſtice, benevolence, piety, devotion, and all other moral virtues. Expoſe your mind repeatedly, and perſeveringly, to the influence of theſe impreſsions, and the affections themſelves will gradually riſe, and inſenſibly improve, till they grow to their proper perfection, and your virtue becomes fixed and diſintereſted. All that is required is judgment, reſolution, time, and perſeverance. And in every ſtage of your progreſs, you will thankfully aſcribe all your improvements, your hopes, and your conſolations to God, to whoſe appointment, and continued agency, all cauſes owe their efficacy.

By ſuch advice as this, a judicious inſtructor would neither expect, nor deſire, to pro-

produce one of thoſe extatic chriſtians, who are ſometimes mounted "on the top of Piſ-"gah," exulting in the proſpect of the promiſed land, and at other times ſighing and weeping in the "vale of humiliation," and tormenting themſelves with doubts, and imaginary terrors; ſometimes full of rapturous affection to their "Beloved," and their ſouls carried out "like the chariots of Ammina-"dib*," and at other times mourning under "the hidings of his face," and crying out, "why ſtay his chariot wheels?" In other words, who are amuſing, or alarming themſelves, with vain phantoms of the imagination, inſtead of engaging with alacrity in the duties of life. But by properly attending to the advice propoſed, they would become virtuous, amiable, and uſeful characters; reſpected by the wiſe and good; enjoying peace in their own minds; repoſing a chearful confidence in God; and looking forward with hope to a bleſſed immortality: their lives would be honourable and exemplary; their death tranquil; and their reward glorious.

* No chariots of Amminadib
The heavenly raptures can deſcribe. WATTS.

In

In contradiction to all this, Mr. W.'s advice to ſuch perſons, p. 325. concurring as he ſays, with the church of England, is, "to lay afreſh the whole foundation of "their religion, to proſtrate themſelves be- "fore the croſs of Chriſt with humble "penitence and deep ſelf-abhorrence, ſo- "lemnly reſolving to forſake all their "ſins, but relying on the grace of God "alone for power to keep their reſolution. "Thus, and thus only, *She* aſſures them "that all their crimes will be blotted out, "and that they will receive from above "a new living principle of holineſs." Then follow a ſeries of texts which he tells us that "*She* produces from the word of God "as the ground and warrant of her coun- "ſel." But if *She* produces no better evidence of her other doctrines than of theſe, it is much to be feared that *She* will be found very deficient, when weighed in the balances of reaſon and truth. Not a word do any of theſe texts contain, of "proſtra- "tion at the foot of the croſs," not a word of "dependence upon the influences of the "ſpirit," not a word of "receiving a new "living principle of holineſs."

The firſt is, Acts xvi. 31. "Believe in "the Lord Jeſus Chriſt and thou ſhalt be ſaved:" where the apoſtle exhorts the terrified jailer, to receive the chriſtian religion, as the only means of ſaving him from the bondage of idolatry and vice, and all its miſerable conſequences. In the ſucceeding texts, quoted from John xv. our Lord, under the emblem of "a vine "and its branches," repreſents a ſtedfaſt adherence to chriſtian principles, as eſſential to the perfection of chriſtian morals.

The laſt paſſage is taken from the epiſtle to the Epheſians, or rather the Laodiceans* ch. ii. 8. And the true meaning is, what no one who is critically acquainted with St. Paul's language can miſtake, that God had graciouſly imparted the goſpel to them, without any antecedent merits of their own; that having been converted from heathen idolatry to the knowledge and worſhip of the true God, they were, in a manner, introduced into a new world; and that the de-

* See Dr. Paley's Horæ Paulinæ, an admirable work, which contains a ſatisfactory defence of the genuineneſs of St. Paul's epiſtles, in a maſterly arrangement of preſumptive and circumſtantial evidence.

ſign

ſign of this extraordinary change, was to make them virtuous and happy. "By grace are "ye ſaved," from idolatry, and vice; "through faith," that is, by embracing the chriſtian religion: "and that, not of your-"ſelves, it is the gift of God." You did not originally ſeek for the bleſsings of the goſpel, but God communicated them to you unaſked, and when you were unconcerned about them, and undeſerving of them.

"Not of works leſt any man ſhould "boaſt." There was not a heathen in the world, who could claim the privileges of the goſpel, as the merited reward of his virtues. "For we are his workmanſhip:" God, having freely given theſe privileges, is to be regarded, as the proper cauſe of the happy effects produced by them. He is the Author of this ſtupendous change, which may be conſidered as an introduction into a new ſtate of being: "We are created in Chriſt Jeſus "to good works." The effect of heathen principles was vice and profligacy, but the tendency of the chriſtian doctrine is, to univerſal virtue.

Mr. W. p. 327. inaccurately repreſents "the grand diſtinction between the true

" chriſtian, and other religioniſts, to ſubſiſt " concerning the nature of holineſs, and " the way in which it is to be obtained. " The nature of holineſs, he tells us, is no " other than the reſtoration of the image " of God." And I believe that all *religioniſts*, (as he is pleaſed to denominate thoſe who differ from him, in contradiſtinction to *true chriſtians*, that is, to the abettors of his own opinions) will agree, that virtue conſiſts in conformity to the moral attributes of God. But there is an eſſential difference of opinion between them, with reſpect to the manner of acquiring it. Mr. W.'s true Chriſtian " diſclaiming with indignation every idea of attaining it by his own ſtrength, all his hopes " of poſſeſsing it, reſt altogether in the di- " vine aſſurances of the operation of the holy " ſpirit;" while my "*Religioniſt*", expecting moral habits to be acquired preciſely in the ſame way in which other habits are attained, makes uſe of ſimilar means: and when the end is accompliſhed he will aſcribe it to the Supreme Being, in the ſame ſenſe in which all other good things are to be referred to him, who is the Cauſe of all cauſes, and

whoſe

whoſe energy gives efficacy, to every intermediate agency.

Mr. W.'s true Chriſtian farther "knows" p. 328. what I hope that my "Religioniſt" will ever remain ignorant of, viz. that "this "holineſs is not to *precede* reconciliation to "God, and be its *cauſe*, but to *follow* it, and "be its *effect*;" that is, in other words, that a vicious man may be in a ſtate of reconciliation with God: than which nothing can be more repugnant to truth, and to the whole tenor of chriſtianity. Mr. W. has indeed a ſaving clauſe, namely, that "by faith in "Chriſt only, he is juſtified in the ſight "of God;" informing us in a note, "that "faith when genuine, includes repentance." Now, according to this ſtate of the queſtion, either a man may "repent," without being "holy," or he may be "juſtified in the ſight "of God," without "being in a ſtate of re-"conciliation with him." Mr. W.'s true chriſtian may, perhaps, be able to ſolve this difficulty, which, I fear, would puzzle the more obtuſe intellect, of my ſimple "religioniſt." And this is the more unfortunate, as we are aſſured p. 329. that "theſe gigantic truths re-

" tained in view, would put to ſhame the lit-
" tleneſs of their dwarfiſh morality."

Mr. W. further obſerves p. 328. that the chriſtian finds, in the conſideration " of " the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel, and " in the contemplation of the life, character, " and ſufferings of our bleſſed Saviour, the " elements of all practical wiſdom." To this obſervation I give my cordial aſſent, provided, that no doctrines are admitted as the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel, but what the goſpel contains.

The remainder of this ſection from p. 331. is taken up in ſhewing that looking unto Jeſus, by which the pious writer means an habitual regard to the doctrine and example of Chriſt, is " the beſt means of producing " and ſupporting the chriſtian virtues" which he there ſpecifies. I entirely concur with him in thinking, that juſt views, and ſerious reflections, upon the character, and doctrine of our great Maſter, have the moſt beneficial moral tendency.

But erroneous views, tend to produce erroneous affections, and an erroneous practice.

Of

Of which we have various inſtances in the caſe before us.

" Looking unto Jeſus," ſays Mr. W. p. 332. " We find diſplayed in the moſt " lively colours the guilt of ſin, and how " hateful it muſt be to the perfect ho- " lineſs of God, when we ſee that rather " than ſin ſhould go unpuniſhed, God ſpared " not his own ſon, but was pleaſed to bruiſe " him and put him to grief." Where does the ſcripture tell us that Jeſus ſuffered, that " ſin might not go unpuniſhed?" and where does it require us to look to the ſufferings of Chriſt, to impreſs upon our minds a ſenſe of the evil of ſin? How unworthy the character of the Supreme Being to puniſh the innocent for the guilty! And how inconſiſtent with the declarations of the ſcriptures, which uniformly repreſent the wicked as puniſhed for their own ſins, and penitents as freely pardoned by Divine mercy, without reference to any foreign conſideration whatever.

The ſon of God is ſaid p. 333. " to " have *conſented* to take upon him our de- " graded nature," language moſt unſcrip-

tural and untrue, and what Jeſus never affirmed of himſelf, nor his apoſtles concerning him.

Mr. W. p. 334. " repreſents looking to " Jeſus as the beſt means of growing in love " to God," I think ſo too, but not in his ſenſe of the phraſe. The goſpel is God's beſt gift to man. It brings life and immortality to light. But that God having firſt placed his creatures in a ſtate of helpleſs miſery, ſhould ſend an innocent perſon to redeem a few by ſuffering in their ſtead, whatever joy it may excite in thoſe who are, or who fancy themſelves to be, the fortunate objects of this choice, can never generate a rational and cordial love, to a Being ſo capricious and cruel. Happily for us the character of the true God is the reverſe of this: All amiable, juſt, wiſe, and good.

Much is advanced, p. 337. to ſhew the tendency of " looking to Jeſus to promote " humility." But to be " impreſſed with " a ſenſe of our natural darkneſs, and help- " leſſneſs, and miſery, from which it was " requiſite to ranſom us at ſuch a price," is not

not chriſtian humility, but injuſtice to our wiſe and good Creator, and an unwarrantable depreciation of his works.

I agree, however, with Mr. W. p. 339. that from the ſufferings of Chriſt, we may juſtly learn not to eſtimate earthly proſperity too highly; and to be willing, like our honoured maſter, to make great ſacrifices in the cauſe of truth, and for the good of others.

We are told p. 346. "that the main "diſtinction between real chriſtianity, and "the ſyſtem of the bulk of nominal chriſ-"tians, chiefly conſiſts in the different place "which is aſsigned in the two ſchemes to "the peculiar doctrines of the goſpel. Theſe, "in the ſcheme of nominal chriſtians, if "admitted at all, appear but like the ſtars "in the firmament to the ordinary eye; "but to the *real chriſtian*, on the con-"trary, theſe peculiar doctrines conſtitute "the centre to which he gravitates, the very "ſun of his ſyſtem, the ſoul of the world, "the origin of all that is excellent and "lovely! the ſource of light, and life, and

"mo-

"motion, and genial warmth and plaſtic "energy."

In terms like theſe, would an eloquent catholic expreſs himſelf, concerning the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, the worſhip of the virgin, and the ſacrifice of the maſs, which are to him eſſential doctrines of the goſpel received by "all *real* chriſtians." Thus does zeal often increaſe, in proportion as the doctrines defended, recede from the ſimplicity of truth, and the purity of the goſpel. But notwithſtanding theſe confident aſſertions, we have no heſitation in denouncing what are here called "the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity," as groſs corruptions of the true religion of Jeſus. And though we do not, after the example of Mr. W. confine the honourable diſtinction of "real chriſtians" to thoſe only who think with us upon theſe ſubjects, we regard it as an indiſpenſible duty, upon every proper occaſion, to avow our determined rejection of them, and to enter our public, ſolemn, proteſt againſt them.

Mr. W. concludes his ſection with a quotation, containing the following addreſs to Chriſt,

Chriſt, *here* called, but no where in the ſcriptures, "the eternal Word."

From Thee is all that ſoothes the life of man,
His high endeavour and his glad ſucceſs.
His ſtrength to ſuffer, and his will to ſerve.
But O thou bounteous Giver of all Good,
Thou art, of all thy gifts, thyſelf the crown.

Language equally unbecoming occurs, p. 341. where Jeſus is addreſſed, as "calling "upon us to ſuffer; as ordaining diſappoint- "ment, poverty, ſickneſs, and ſhame; and "as compenſating temporal ſufferings by "the conſolations of his grace."

This may juſtly be called, ſupplanting the true God in the throne of the univerſe, by the introduction of an imaginary ſubſtitute. If Chriſt is the "centre of all minds," the "giver of all good," and the "diſ- "poſer of all events," that great Being, whom the pious and humble Jeſus calls "his "Father and our Father, his God and our "God*," is a mere cypher in the creation. Surely, this is palpable idolatry. And that any perſons profeſsing the chriſtian religion, with the ſcriptures in their hands, ſhould

* John xx. 17.

receive

receive a doctrine, and exemplify a practice, so directly repugnant to the first principles of the christian religion, and to it's most explicit precepts, is a fact which could hardly be credited, if not verified by daily experience; and is a memorable, and much to be lamented instance, of the fascinating power of religious prejudice.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XVI.

Excellences of chriſtianity. Internal evidence.

MADAM,

IN the ſhort chapter, c. v. which ſucceeds that in which Mr. Wilberforce treats ſo much in detail upon what he regards as "the prevailing inadequate conceptions of "practical chriſtianity," he inſiſts "upon "the excellence of chriſtianity in certain "important particulars, and upon the argu-"ment which reſults thence, in proof of it's "divine origin." And he here notices "the conſiſtency between the leading doc-"trines and practical precepts of chriſtianity "p. 350. amongſt each other." Having purſued this ſubject a little in detail, he mentions it as "a further excellence of the "chriſtian religion, that it ſets a higher "value upon moral than upon intellectual "attainment;" p. 356. and he concludes the chapter with noticing "the ſtrong preſump-"tion in favour of the divine authority of "the chriſtian religion, ariſing from the dif-

"ferent

" ferent ſpecies of proofs which concur in " eſtabliſhing it."

In the general ſentiments advanced in this chapter, I am happy to agree with the very reſpectable author, and the concluding obſervations in favour of the divine original of the chriſtian religion, though not new, are juſt, and placed in a ſtrong and ſtriking light. But ſo far as the obſervations concerning the mutual harmony, and beneficial influence of chriſtian doctrines, and moral precepts, are well founded, they are by no means peculiar to thoſe opinions which are dignified with the title, of " the " leading doctrines of chriſtianity ;" but on the contrary, the beauty, and harmony, of the chriſtian ſcheme, of doctrine, and morals, is much more clearly apparent, when it is exhibited in its original ſimple form, purified from the dregs of human inventions.

In reference to " the perfect harmony of " the leading doctrines of chriſtianity among " each other, it is alledged p. 350. to be " ſelf evident that the corruption of human " nature, that our reconciliation to God by " the atonement of Chriſt, and that the " reſtora-

" reſtoration of our primitive dignity by the " ſanctifying influence of the holy ſpirit, " are all parts of one whole united in cloſe " dependence and mutual congruity." Now, though it may be allowed that there is a viſible connexion between the doctrine of " natural depravity," and the " ſanctifying " influences of the ſpirit," there is none between that doctrine and the ſuppoſed " atone- " ment of Chriſt." For if God made human nature depraved and guilty, what need could there be of ſatisfaction from another Being, to reconcile him to his own work. At any rate, the conſiſtency of theſe doctrines, is nothing more than the conſiſtency of error, one error naturally producing another, till in the end genuine chriſtianity is almoſt loſt. Popery is a conſiſtent ſyſtem, but is it therefore true? Tranſubſtantiation, merit, purgatory, auricular confeſſion, abſolution, indulgences, and prayers for the dead, " are all parts of one whole, united " in cloſe dependence and mutual con- " gruity;" but they are not, for that reaſon, truths of the goſpel; nor have the " pecu-

"liar and leading doctrines" of Mr. W. any better pretenſions.

Concerning the mutual conſiſtency of the evangelical precepts, it is well obſerved p. 352. that "for loving kindneſs and meek-"neſs, a ſolid foundation is laid in ſelf-de-"nial, moderation, and humility," and p. 356. "that chriſtianity teaching us not to "prize human eſtimation at a very high rate, "provides for the practice of loving thoſe, "who juſtly or unjuſtly may have wounded "our character." Alſo, p. 356. "that it is "another capital excellence of chriſtianity, "that ſhe values moral attainments at a "much higher rate than intellectual acqui-"ſitions." We are not, however, to conclude, that great eminence in virtue is to be attained by men who are groſsly ignorant. A man may be a great ſcholar, and a profound philoſopher, without being eminently virtuous; but no man can riſe to diſtinguiſhed moral excellence, without a conſiderable inſight into human nature, and comprehenſive views of the theory of morals, and the principles of religion. No miſtake is more frequent, nor more derogatory from the

the dignity of morals, than that of ſuppoſing that knowledge is not eſſential to virtue. It is no doubt true, that many weak, ignorant people, are as pious and good as they know how to be. But no great, exalted, and eminently uſeful character, was ever formed without having its foundation laid in a capacious, and highly cultivated underſtanding.

It is obſerved p. 359. that "the operations "of the holy ſpirit, prompting and aiding "our diligent endeavours, would infallibly "crown our labours with ſucceſs and make "us partakers of a divine nature." It is unneceſſary here, to repeat the objections already ſo frequently urged, againſt the unphiloſophical, and unſcriptural doctrine of the holy ſpirit, and his ſupernatural influences; but it is particularly worthy of remark, with what propriety Mr. W. uſes the ſtrong expreſsion of being made "partakers of the "divine nature *." How aſtoniſhed would this gentleman be, if any of his readers could ſo far miſtake his meaning, as to ſuppoſe that he intended to repreſent ſincere chriſtians, as ſubſtantially united with the

* 2 Pet. i. 4.

Supreme Being, partaking of the ſame attributes, and entitled to the ſame honours! Such is the error of thoſe, who believe in the deity of Jeſus of Nazareth, to whom no epithet equally expreſsive of true, and proper divinity, is applied in the New Teſtament.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XVII.

On the ſtate of religion in this country, and its importance to us as a political Community.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce in his next chapter, p. 364. profeſſes, " to enquire into the " ſtate of chriſtianity in this country, and " its importance to us as a political com- " munity." No one can be more fully perſuaded than I am, that practical chriſtianity is of the higheſt importance to ſociety, as it comprehends the moſt perfect rule of life, and ſuggeſts the moſt efficacious motives, both to private and public virtue; in which view, every true and enlightened friend to his country, whether in a private or public capacity, will contribute to the utmoſt of his power, by every judicious means, to promote it. But here again Mr. W. unfortunately confounds his own unſcriptural ſyſtem, with the doctrine of the New Teſtament, and by this fallaci-

ous teſt, he forms his judgment of the actual ſtate of religion in this country; and, as might naturally be expected, his concluſions are not more accurate than his ſtandard.

Mr. W. is incorrect when he aſſerts, p. 364. "the tendency of *religion in* "*general*, to promote the temporal well-"being of political communities." This aſſertion holds good only of *true* religion. Falſe religions, ſuch as paganiſm, and popery, tend to debaſe the public intellect, and to deprave the public morals. Such religions indeed ſerve as engines of ſtate, far better than rational piety; and have therefore in every age been cried up, by intereſted ſtateſmen, and their hireling prieſts; but they can never be approved by the judicious friends of virtue, and mankind.

Mr. W. having remarked, p. 369. that "perſecution generally tends to quicken "the vigour, and extend the prevalence of "the opinions which ſhe would eradicate," argues the decline of chriſtianity in this country, p. 370. "from her having long "been embodied in an eſtabliſhment which

"is

" is intimately blended, and is generally
" and juſtly believed to have a common in-
" tereſt, with our civil inſtitutions, which
" is liberally endowed, and, not more fa-
" voured in wealth than dignity, has been
" allowed to exalt her mitred front in courts
" and parliaments."

To this repreſentation, as a ſtatement of facts, I can by no means yield my aſſent.

Pure chriſtianity is ſo far from meeting with public encouragement in this country, that it is at this hour, in a ſtate bordering upon perſecution. And they who have courage openly to profeſs it, and to bear their public, however unaſſuming teſtimony, againſt prevailing corruptions, are regarded with ſuſpicion, branded with opprobrious names, and unjuſtly expoſed to public odium as enemies to religion and to their country. One venerable man, whoſe name will ever be dear to the friends of truth and ſcience, whoſe purity of character bids defiance to calumny, and whoſe ſimplicity of manners indicates the correctneſs of his principles, and the dignity of his mind, has, *ſolely* for his ardent zeal for truth, and his

fearleſs profeſsion of genuine chriſtianity, been compelled to ſeek for refuge in the tranſatlantic wilderneſs, where, among the enlightened ſages of a riſing empire, he has found that ſafety, tranquillity, and renown, which was denied to his declining years by his deluded, and ungrateful country. Mr. W.'s aſſertion is nevertheleſs true. "Chriſtianity has always thriven under "perſecutions." The number of rational chriſtians, who, rejecting all human additions to divine revelation, adhere faithfully to the ſimplicity of truth, was never ſo great as at preſent. And it is ſtill a progreſsive cauſe. May it never be impeded in its courſe, by the injudicious ſupport of civil authority!

For I acknowledge, that my idea of a civil eſtabliſhment of the chriſtian religion, is diametrically oppoſite to that of Mr. W. The ſyſtem which he calls chriſtianity, may indeed be "embodied in an eſtabliſhment, which "is intimately blended, and hath a common "intereſt, with civil inſtitutions." But the kingdom of Chriſt "is not of this world," and his doctrine ſhall reign triumphant, when all human ſyſtems, with the autho-

rities which ſupported them, ſhall vaniſh "like the baſeleſs fabric of a viſion."

The immediate tendency of a civil eſtabliſhment of religion, is to obſtruct the progreſs of chriſtian principles, and of ſound morals. When a ſyſtem, whether true or falſe, is once eſtabliſhed, and the profeſsion of it is paid for out of the public purſe, all enquiry is at an end. Integrity, and the love of truth, yield to indolence, pride, and bitter zeal againſt thoſe who attack, not, the doctrines of religion, but thoſe of the public creed. An eſtabliſhed prieſthood is, in its very nature, a perſecuting order. There has been no exception to this rule. Heathen and chriſtian, jew and mahometan, papiſt and proteſtant, epiſcopalian and preſbyterian, when in power, have all breathed the ſame fiery, intemperate ſpirit; a few enlightened individuals only excepted. Men who are engaged to defend an eſtabliſhed ſyſtem are, from that very circumſtance, engaged to diſcourage enquiry, and to oppoſe truth, unleſs (which is not often the caſe) truth ſhould happen to be the eſtabliſhed doctrine.

Mr. W. proceeds, p. 371. to exhibit an "hypothetical delineation" of that ſtate of religion, which might be expected to take place, in a country circumſtanced like our own, and concludes, p. 376. with an appeal to facts, as juſtifying his gloomy apprehenſions. "Every where, ſays he, we "may actually trace the effects of increaſ-"ing wealth and luxury, in baniſhing one "by one the habits, and new modelling the "phraſeology, of ſtricter times; and in dif-"fuſing throughout the middle ranks thoſe "relaxed morals and diſsipated manners, "which were formerly confined to the "higher claſſes of ſociety."

"I pity the man" (to borrow our author's own words upon another occaſion,) "who can travel from Dan to Beer-"ſheba, and cry, it is all barren." Who, when he views the moral conduct of his fellow-creatures, can diſcern nothing but depravity of nature, and progreſsion in vice. It is indeed true, that the maſs of mankind, in the preſent age, pay too little attention to religion; but at what period were they more pious, and virtuous, than they

they now are? I doubt the juſtice, as well as the wiſdom, of the eternal declamation, that the "former times were better than "theſe." In the preſent age there is indeed an unuſual tendency to infidelity, but it may juſtly be doubted, whether the moral conſequences of modern ſcepticiſm be more injurious, than the old habit of implicit faith, and its uſual accompaniments, bigotry, and perſecution. Genuine chriſtianity was, probably, never better underſtood in this country, nor more generally practiſed, than at preſent. Perſons who conceive that religion conſiſts in antiquated phraſeology, in attachment to unſcriptural doctrines and creeds, and to ſabbatical obſervations, or in the number and length of religious exerciſes, will of courſe imagine that religion is now much on the decline. But they who place the eſſence of chriſtianity, in active benevolence, and habitual ſelf-government, from a regard to God, and under the expectation of a future life, may perhaps ſee reaſon to think that there is as much real religion *now* as *formerly*, when there was more parade of it. If love to God be in any degree diminiſhed, it may in part be attributed to the unamiable

ble repreſentations, which the popular ſyſtem exhibits, of the Supreme Being. We cannot take pleaſure in meditating upon God, nor feel proper regard towards him, till we have learned to conceive of him as perfectly wiſe, benevolent, and juſt; and to regard him as our Father, and our Friend.

Amongſt other inſtances of national degeneracy, Mr. W. mentions, p. 377. "giving up to vanity and diſſipation the portion of the week ſet apart to the ſervice of religion," and likewiſe, "availing ourſelves of the certainty of an interval from public buſineſs on a day of national humiliation, to ſecure a meeting for convivial purpoſes."

That perſons who are prohibited by law, from following their uſual occupations on the Sunday, and who have no taſte for the ſervices of religion, paſs that day in idleneſs, and diſſipation, highly prejudicial to their morals, is a fact too obvious to be denied; and which every ſincere friend to virtue and religion, muſt deeply lament. And it is evidently owing, entirely, to the folly of attempting to enforce the ſuppoſed laws

of

of God, by civil ſanctions. Men may be compelled to be idle, but they cannot be compelled to be good. And the natural and neceſſary conſequence of idleneſs, is vice. Without pretending to the gift of prophecy, I will venture to predict, that as long as the preſent injudicious laws, enforcing the ſabbatical obſervation of the firſt day of the week, remain in the ſtatute book, the national morals will be more corrupted on that day, than upon all the others taken together. Happily for the intereſt of good morals, the legiſlature wiſely declined to adopt a propoſition introduced, not long ſince, by ſome well-meaning, but ill adviſed, members of the Houſe of Commons, for enforcing a ſtill ſtricter obſervation of the Lord's day. But the public morals will never be entirely freed from an unfavourable bias from this quarter, till the apoſtolical canon becomes the law of the land, "As one man regards one day "above another, and another regards every "day alike, let every one be fully per-"ſuaded in his own mind, and freely en-"joy his own opinion*."

* Rom. xiv. 5.

A re-

A religious diſtinction of days having been expreſsly aboliſhed by the chriſtian law, no human authority hath any juſt right to revive it, much leſs is any one at liberty to condemn another, for devoting a day to innocent chearfulneſs, which he chuſes to dedicate to rigorous auſterity. But this cenſorious ſpirit is the natural conſequence of ſuch voluntary ſervices. The puerile notion, that occaſional abſtinence from food is acceptable to God, any farther than it may be conducive to health or temperance, or, that it is more agreable to the Almighty that a man ſhould dine upon fiſh rather than upon fleſh, is inconſiſtent with the manly genius of chriſtianity, and even with common ſenſe. A national faſt therefore, is at beſt an unauthorized, and an inſignificant inſtitution. But if ſuch a ceremony is ever appointed by a body of men, who notoriouſly diſregarding all appearances of religion themſelves, make uſe of it as a mere engine of ſtate, to ſubſerve their own ſiniſter purpoſes, it behoves every one who is really concerned for the honour of chriſtianity, to treat ſuch an inſtitution with neglect,

lect, as an affront to religion and decency *.

Mr. W.'s zeal in the cauſe of national deterioration, has led him, p. 378. to make the extraordinary and unfounded aſſertion, that "improving in almoſt every other "branch of knowledge, we have become "leſs and leſs acquainted with chriſtia-"nity." Now religion being a ſubject ſufficiently intereſting to attract the attention of the moſt intelligent and inquiſitive minds, it does not appear in itſelf probable that religious knowledge would decline, when every other ſcience was in a ſtate of progreſsive improvement. And the fact is the reverſe of this; of which Mr. W. himſelf might have been convinced, had he read with ſufficient attention the works of

* Mr. W. takes ſome pains in the note, p. 377. to exculpate his friend Mr. Pitt from the heinous offence, of giving a dinner on the faſt day. Our worthy author does not ſeem to be aware, that the world is now too much enlightened to ſuppoſe that ſtateſmen are themſelves ſerious in ſuch obſervances. The public are fully ſenſible that faſts are intended for the ſwiniſh multitude, and not for cabinet miniſters.

Locke,

Locke, Taylor, Peirce, Lardner, Benſon, Jebb, Wakefield, Evanſon, Lindſey, Prieſtley, and many others. He would there have found, that by the induſtry and ingenuity of men of learning and integrity, innumerable difficulties have been cleared up, and many interpolations, omiſsions, falſe readings, miſtranſlations, and erroneous interpretations, which have laid a foundation for, or have been appealed to in ſupport of, various corrupt ſyſtems of doctrine, have been in the moſt ſatisfactory manner corrected, or removed. The conſequence of which is, that to thoſe who now devote a ſerious and critical attention to the ſcriptures, the chriſtian doctrine appears plain, ſimple, rational, every way worthy of God, and eſtabliſhed upon a baſis of evidence, internal and external, which no ſophiſtry can evade, nor malignity ſubvert. It would be inexcuſable upon this head, not to notice the great benefit which the chriſtian religion has derived in the courſe of this century, from the labours of learned foreigners, and particularly of thoſe indefatigable critics, who

who have applied their induſtry and inge-
nuity to the formation of a correct text of
the New Teſtament, by the collation of a
great number of valuable manuſcripts, anci-
ent verſions, and quotations by the early
chriſtian writers. Amongſt theſe the laſt,
but not the leaſt meritorious, is Grieſbach,
whoſe critical edition of the New Teſtament
in Greek, is an invaluable treaſure to the
Biblical ſtudent. Nor can I, upon this occa-
ſion, refrain from offering the tribute of re-
ſpect and gratitude due to a nobleman, the
ſplendour of whoſe rank and talents, is only
exceeded by the eminence of his virtues,
and his firm, but unaſſuming attachment to
pure and rational chriſtianity, for the liberal
aſsiſtance he has afforded to the learned
author, to enable him to furniſh a more
correct edition of that truly eſtimable work.
If Mr. W. had employed his time in ſtudy-
ing the ſcriptures diligently, and critically,
with ſuch helps as theſe, inſtead of poring
over creeds, articles, and homilies, the works
of honeſt, pious, and uſeful men, who in
their day were "burning and ſhining lights,"

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but who juſt emerging from the barbariſm of the dark ages, were deſtitute of the many advantages which we enjoy, for attaining ſcriptural knowledge, he would not have hazarded the extravagant poſition, that "improving "in almoſt every other branch of know- "ledge, we have become leſs and leſs ac- "quainted with chriſtianity."

It is mentioned, p. 378. as a matter of ſerious regret, that a diſpoſition prevails even among "orthodox chriſtians themſelves, to "forget the peculiar doctrines by which "their religion is characterized, and to regard "chriſtianity as a mere ſyſtem of ethics;" and the reaſon aſsigned, p. 381. for this declenſion is, that the abuſe of theſe doctrines, "by the ſectaries of the laſt cen- "tury," led the divines of the eſtabliſhed church into a practical ſtrain of preaching, "and their example having been followed "during the preſent century, theſe *pecu- "liar doctrines* have at length almoſt alto- "gether vaniſhed from the view."

Of this neglect a more probable reaſon may perhaps be, that men of underſtanding beginning to ſuſpect the truth of the doctrines,

trines, and not thinking it prudent, or even decent, to preach againſt the tenets of a church of which they were members, and from which they derived ſubſiſtence, regarded it as the beſt and ſafeſt courſe, to be ſilent upon theſe topics, and to confine themſelves wholly to practical ſubjects.

Mr. W. affirms, p. 379. that "chriſti-" anity in its beſt days, was ſuch as it is " delineated in his work." And in proof of this aſſertion, he appeals to the writings of the reformers, and their ſucceſſors, and to the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the church. But notwithſtanding this parade of authorities, it is a certain fact, that genuine chriſtianity bears not the ſmalleſt reſemblance to that ſpurious ſyſtem which is here offered to our view. The times of emerging from the corruptions of popery, were indeed "good days," and the men who helped forward the neceſſary work of reformation, were, in general, men of exemplary morals, and unuſual energy of mind. But they were not infallible. It was not to be expected that they ſhould, at once, ſhake

off all the prejudices of their education. They left much to be done by thoſe who came after them; who, enjoying the benefit of their light, might ſee much farther than they did. God be praiſed, *ours* are "better days" than theirs, both with reſpect to light and liberty. We ſee, and hear, what "thoſe righteous men of old," had they been now living, and had their advances in knowledge kept pace with their means of improvement, "would have rejoiced to ſee "and hear, but were not permitted *."

That the compilers of the articles, homilies, and liturgy, were believers in the

* As a proteſtant nonconformiſt, I thank Mr. W. for his ſpirited proteſt, p. 339. againſt the Act of Uniformity, and the conſequent ejection of many of the brighteſt ornaments of the church in "ſhameful violation of the "royal word, as well as of the clear principles of juſ-"tice." This is the more liberal, as Mr. W. appears himſelf to be a zealous member of the eſtabliſhed church. Baxter well deſerves the encomiums paſſed upon his talents and his virtues. Mr. W. might have added to the liſt of his works, abridged by the late Mr. Fawcett of Kidderminſter, his "Converſe with God in ſolitude." An abridgement of the "Reformed Paſtor," was publiſhed ſome years ago, by Mr. Palmer of Hackney.

"pecu-

" peculiar doctrines," ſo often alluded to, cannot be denied, and the authoritative impoſition of ſuch articles, exhibits a melancholy proof of the inconſiſtency of the early reformers, in attempting to ſet limits to the progreſs of moral and intellectual improvement, and to abridge in others, that right of private judgment, the plenary exerciſe of which they ſo nobly, and juſtly, challenged for themſelves.

Mr. W. affirms, p. 380. and perhaps truly, that the doctrines he calls peculiar, " were grievouſly abuſed by many of the " ſectaries who, while they talked copi- " ouſly of the free grace of Chriſt, and the " operations of the Holy Spirit, were by " their lives an open ſcandal to the name " of chriſtian." Yet Mr. W. does not think theſe doctrines the leſs true, becauſe they were profeſſed by men of immoral characters. Let him not then be ſurprized, if ſerious Unitarians do not think the worſe of *their* principles, becauſe they are maintained by ſome who are not of a ſerious ſpirit. And let him acknowledge the fallacy, of judging

of the truth of principles, by the characters of thoſe who profeſs them.

Conſidering the ſpirit of the preſent times, it diſcovers a conſiderable degree of liberality, to ſpeak in reſpectful terms of the diſſenting writers*. I cannot however entirely acquieſce in all the commendations beſtowed upon them, p. 381. Owen, Howe, and Flavel, were great and popular men in their day; but their works at preſent are of little uſe. Dr. Evans's "Chriſtian Temper" is excellent for the time in which it was written, and by a judicious reader may ſtill be peruſed with advantage. But

* It would however have been more conſiſtent with genuine liberality to have avoided the uſe of the obnoxious word "Sectary." If this word ſignified nothing more than a diſſenter from an eſtabliſhed church, the uſe of it would not be liable to objection. But it is conſtantly uſed as a term of reproach. The church of Rome conſiſtently enough brands the proteſtants, as ſectaries, becauſe ſhe claims to be the only true and infallible church. But for proteſtants, whoſe common and fundamental principle is the right of private judgment, to load each other with opprobrious epithets for differences of opinion, is in the higheſt degree unreaſonable and inconſiſtent.

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it is in a great meaſure ſuperſeded by more recent publications, both of the eſtabliſhed, and the diſſenting clergy. Perhaps the beſt practical treatiſe in the Engliſh language, is Dr. Hartley's Obſervations on the Rule of Life, at the cloſe of his celebrated Obſervations on Man. But even in Hartley there are ſome exceptionable paſſages, which a candid judicious reader will eaſily diſcover, and readily excuſe.

Dr. Doddridge's Riſe and Progreſs of Religion in the Soul, his ſermons on Regeneration, and thoſe on the Power and Grace of Chriſt, though they contain ſome valuable advice, are formed upon a very erroneous and unſcriptural ſyſtem, and the peruſal of them tends to introduce a train of viſionary ſpeculations, and fantaſtic emotions, which have little connexion with rational piety. Dr. Doddridge's attachment to the gloomy ſyſtem of calviniſm, or to ſomething that would paſs for it, and his love of popularity, ſtrangely warped his judgment in the interpretation of the ſcriptures, and have rendered

him in many inſtances a very unſafe guide to their true meaning *.

Mr. Orton's Life of Dr. Doddridge contains many uſeful facts and obſervations, it exhibits the ſubject of the narrative as a man of a very active mind, and a pious, benevolent heart, but it has too much the appearance of an attempt to delineate a character, according to the author's idea of perfection, beyond the ſtandard of human excellence; a fault common to moſt biographers.

* Dr. Doddridge's Expoſitor is in many reſpects a valuable work, the notes are uſeful, and the Improvements are drawn up with animation, and breathe a truly pious and benevolent ſpirit. But that his judgment was biaſſed in an uncommon degree, in the interpretation of thoſe paſſages, in which his orthodoxy might be brought into queſtion, is but too apparent to every one who pays ſufficient attention to this popular work. One inſtance, out of many, occurs Rom. iii. 25. where the expreſſion *propitiation* is introduced, though it is well known that the word, ſo tranſlated, has no other ſenſe in the ſacred writings than that of a Mercy-ſeat. Thus it is, that unlearned readers are made to believe that the apoſtles teach doctrines of which they never entertained a thought; and ſuch ſpurious tenets are too often called "fundamental truths," and the "peculiar doctrines "of the goſpel."

It is held out, p. 386. as "a melancholy "prognoſtic of the ſtate to which we are "progreſsive, that many of the moſt emi-"nent of the literati of modern times have "been profeſſed unbelievers." The truth is, that many reputed philoſophers, and men of learning in all ages, have been unbelievers. One cauſe of which has been, a want of attention to the evidences of revelation; and another, the many corruptions of revealed truth, which have been miſtaken for chriſtian doctrines, to which men of ſenſe and reflection could not aſſent. But there has always been a numerous band of men, eminent for talents and learning, who have appeared in defence of the chriſtian cauſe; and rational chriſtianity is never in want of a ſufficient number of learned and judicious advocates.

That an abſurd and domineering religious eſtabliſhment, the doctrines of which were held in contempt by every man of ſenſe and reflection, ſhould have produced a great number of unbelievers among the thinking part of the French nation, is not ſurprizing. It is the neceſſary conſequence

of ſuch eſtabliſhments. Nor is it difficult to diſcover why Mr. W. as a political partizan, may think fit to join the ſenſeleſs clamour againſt the French, as a nation of atheiſts. But upon what grounds, as a chriſtian, as a proteſtant, and as one who has aſſumed the office of a public cenſor of the principles and morals of his chriſtian brethren, he can juſtify his repreſentation of the abolition of popery in France, p. 388. " as " publicly withdrawing their allegiance from " the Majeſty of Heaven," it becomes that gentleman ſeriouſly to conſider. Every enlightened chriſtian muſt ſurely rejoice in the diſſolution of the abſurdeſt ſyſtem which ever diſgraced the name of religion; and placing full confidence in the omnipotence of truth, can entertain no apprehenſion that genuine chriſtianity will ſuffer, becauſe it is not taken under the protection of the ſtate. If report ſpeaks true, the churches in France are more crouded now, than ever; and that the preſent governors of France are not atheiſts, is evident from the ſpeech of Reveilliere Lepeaux, the Preſident of the Directory, upon the anniverſary of the foundation of the repub-

republic, on the 22d of September, 1797, which is a continued addreſs of thankſgiving to God, for having eſtabliſhed a republican government in France *.

Mr. W. p. 391. in reply to the charge that " his ſyſtem is too ſtrict, and that if it " were generally to prevail, the buſineſs of " the world could not go on," obſerves, amongſt other things, that " if chriſtianity, " ſuch as we have repreſented it, were " generally to prevail, the world, from " being ſuch as it is, would become a ſcene

* The advocates for the orthodoxy of the Britiſh Cabinet, will hardly object, that the prayer of the French Directory is a hypocritical farce to delude the vulgar. Yet even this would prove that the French in general are not a nation of atheiſts, as, to ſerve the purpoſes of party, they have been ſo aſſiduouſly and falſely repreſented. Reveilliere Lepeaux is a member of the Theophilanthropic Society, a religious community lately introduced into France, whoſe common principle is a belief in the exiſtence, perfection, and providence of God, and in the doctrine of a future life; and whoſe rule of morals is, love to God, and good will to men. This ſect is in a very flouriſhing ſtate; its profeſſed principles comprehend the eſſence of the chriſtian religion: But not admitting the reſurrection of Chriſt, the Theophilanthropiſts deprive themſelves of the only ſolid ground, on which to build the hope of a future exiſtence.

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" of general peace and proſperity, and " abating the chances and calamities which " fleſh is inſeparably heir to, would wear " one unwearied face of complacency and " joy." It is indeed probable that if, even Mr. W.'s chriſtianity were to prevail, the world would be better and happier than it is; but that it would " wear an un- " wearied face of complacency and joy," I can never credit, ſo long as any correct ideas of juſtice, and benevolence, ſhould remain in the human mind. The ſtern character of Mr. W.'s God muſt ever be a ſource of anxiety and terror, which the oppoſite character of a ſecond divine perſon, could never completely relieve. But all the happy conſequences which Mr. W. aſcribes to *chriſtianity, as he repreſents it*, would certainly follow, from the univerſal prevalence of the religion of Jeſus, as *repreſented* in the *New Teſtament*.

It is with equal truth, and ſpirit, that chriſtianity is deſcribed in the following pages, as of the higheſt advantage to political ſocieties, in recommending virtuous induſtry, in producing a benign effect upon national

tional character, in encouraging true patriotiſm, and ſuppreſsing a ſelfiſh ſpirit, and it is juſtly obſerved in the concluſion, p. 406. "that the chriſtianity which can produce "effects like theſe, muſt be real, not nomi-"nal, deep, not ſuperficial."

Mr. W. repreſents, p. 408. the "revival "of *vital* chriſtianity," which, as he explains it, is the practical belief of the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the church, as the only effectual means of ſtrengthening the church eſtabliſhment; for "the "anomaly will not much longer be borne, "of an eſtabliſhment, the actual principles "of the bulk of whoſe members, and even "teachers, are ſo extremely different from "thoſe which it profeſſes." This is indeed an alarming repreſentation, from high authority, of the danger of the church. For, few thinking perſons, beſides the pious author of the Practical View, expect the return of ſuch an age of darkneſs, as to produce a general belief of all that is contained in obſolete articles, homilies, and creeds. I doubt whether even his own faith, large as it is, extends quite ſo far. But let

let Mr. W. be comforted. The caſe may not be ſo deſperate as he imagines. He may learn, perhaps, from the Right Reverend Bench itſelf, and certainly, from the *orthodox chriſtians* of Birmingham, that there are other ways of ſupporting an eſtabliſhment, beſides a real perſuaſion of the truth of its doctrine; and I ſtrongly ſuſpect, that the prelate of Rocheſter, would ſmile at the honeſt ſimplicity of the member for Yorkſhire, in ſuppoſing that a ſincere faith in creeds, and homilies, is at all neceſſary to the permanent proſperity of a national church.

The author goes on to obſerve, p. 409. "the kind of religion which we have recommended *whatever opinion may be entertained concerning its truth*, and to ſay nothing of the agency of divine grace, muſt at leaſt be *conceded* to be the *only* one which is at all ſuited to make impreſſion upon the lower orders, by ſtrongly intereſting the paſſions of the human mind." Who the perſons may be, that are ſo ready to make the extraordinary *conceſſions* contained in the preceding paragraph, Mr. W. beſt knows.

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I do not indeed wonder that they who believe with him, that all men by nature are "tainted radically, and to the very "core, with ſin;" that even the elect would not have been ſaved, unleſs one God had died to ſatisfy the juſtice, and appeaſe the wrath of another, and that none of the hapleſs race of Adam can do any thing to extricate themſelves from the wretched condition in which their Creator placed them, till they are regenerated, and new created, by a third God, who is at the ſame time one with, and diſtinct from, the other two; I do not, I ſay, wonder, that a perſon who believes all this, and who ſees the great effect which ſuch ſtupendous myſteries produce upon the ignorant multitude, ſhould imagine that ſuch a religion, is the only one ſuited to make impreſſion upon the lower orders. But, that any perſon admitting the divine authority of the chriſtian revelation, and regarding theſe doctrines as irrational, unſcriptural, and antichriſtian, ſhould make the conceſſion here ſuppoſed, appears moſt unaccountable and incredible. In the Acts

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of the apoſtles we read that at one time "three thouſand were converted;" at another "five thouſand;" that "multi-"tudes believed in the Lord, both of men "and women;" and that "myriads of "jews in particular, profeſſed the chriſ-"tian faith." But certainly a man would be much at a loſs to diſcover theſe "peculiar "doctrines" in the apoſtolical diſcourſes recorded in that hiſtory*; and to aſſert that they were introduced by the apoſtles in their preaching, although omitted by their hiſtorian, would be a moſt arbitrary and unwarrantable aſſumption. The genuine doctrines of the goſpel, which are indeed too ſimple and ſublime to work powerfully, and inſtantaneouſly, upon the groſs paſsions of the uninformed multitude, but which, when duly attended to, will ſtrongly intereſt the beſt affections both of the learned and the unlearned, will moſt aſſuredly be

* See Dr. Toulmin's Letters on the Practical Efficacy of the Unitarian Doctrine.

found

found ſufficiently efficacious in the hand of Divine Providence, to accompliſh their proper effect, at the proper time, and they need no human additions, to render them more intereſting to the human paſſions.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XVIII.

Whether popularity be a criterion of Truth. The beſt means of oppoſing Atheiſm and Immorality. Stability of an Eſtabliſhed Church.

MADAM,

OUR author ſeems to regret, p. 409. "that the reign of prejudice, and even of "honeſt prepoſſeſsion, and of grateful ve- "neration, by which," as he obſerves, "almoſt any ſyſtem may be ſupported, is "no more." And indeed with reaſon: for when eſtabliſhed prejudice, and unreaſonable prepoſſeſsion, however honeſt, is removed, it is much to be apprehended, that his "peculiar doctrines" will not long maintain their ground. Mr. W. however, is not the true born Engliſhman who values his prejudices "becauſe they are prejudices." He aſsigns a reaſon, ſuch as it is, why we ſhould retain the ſyſtem of principles which we have received from our anceſtors. "The ancients," he aſſures us, p. 409. "were wiſer than ourſelves." Hence he infers, that deference is due to their authority in

in religion. And, admitting the premiſes, the concluſion naturally follows. But where are we to learn the fact? Probability is clearly on the other ſide of the queſtion. The moderns are endued with natural powers equal to thoſe of the ancients, they are placed in circumſtances far more favourable to mental improvement, and enjoy the benefit of the experience of their predeceſſors; it requires better evidence than mere unſupported aſſertion, to prove that under theſe circumſtances the wiſdom of the moderns is inferior to that of the ancients. Indeed, it is high time to lay aſide the trite and unmeaning cant of the "wiſdom of our anceſtors." Their age was the infancy, our's approaches towards the maturity of the world. It would be equally rational for the man of ripened underſtanding, to talk of the wiſdom of his childhood.

But if we will not bow to the wiſdom of our anceſtors, who "kept philoſophy to themſelves, and left religion for the million, as alone adapted to their groſſer natures," p. 410. a triumphant appeal is made to fact,

in proof of the ſuperior excellence of this myſtical ſyſtem. "Let the Socinian and "the moral teacher of chriſtianity come "forth, and tell us what effects *they* have "produced on the lower orders. They "themſelves will hardly deny the inefficacy "of their inſtructions." This is aſſuming a very lofty tone of addreſs indeed: but by what right, does not clearly appear; and how far conſiſtent with that humility which the author every where affects, it behoves him ſeriouſly to conſider. A writer who is juſtly entitled to great deference, aſſures us, that "the day is coming which will prove "every man's work," and exhorts us "to "judge nothing before the time." He alſo teaches, that "it does not become the mi-"niſters of the goſpel to glory." Mr. W. well knows that the moſt enlightened and zealous miniſters of religion, have often appeared "to labour in vain, and to ſpend their ſtrength "for nought." This might have taught him not to judge of the truth of a doctrine, by the ſucceſs of its advocates, even though the men, whom he invidiouſly calls the

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Socinian, and the moral teacher of christianity, had been in fact, as unsuccessful as he is pleased to represent them. I am no Socinian: for my creed is as remote from that of Socinus, as it is from the "peculiar doctrines" of Mr. W. But I profess myself to be, an Unitarian christian, and "a moral teacher of christianity," and I can assure the gentleman, who takes upon himself to call us to account, that I am not at all inclined to admit the absolute inefficacy of our instructions. It is an indubitable fact, whether Mr. W. is aware of it or not, that there are in this country thousands who are not ashamed to avow the Unitarian doctrine, and whose lives are as honourable to their profession, as if they were adepts in all the "peculiarities" of his creed. And there is reason to believe that there are thousands more, both in the church and out of it, who think with us, but who are deterred by secular considerations, and the harsh spirit of the times, from avowing their real principles. "Loving the praise of men, more than "the praise of God *."

* John xii. 43.

Yet ſtill it is alledged, that our ſucceſs is as nothing, in compariſon with that of thoſe who teach the ſyſtem of doctrines here recommended, and which is ſaid, to have "proved its correſpondence with the character originally given of chriſtianity, that "it was calculated for the poor, by changing "the whole condition of the maſs of ſociety "in many of the moſt populous diſtricts "in this and other countries." But whither does this argument tend? Are the Calviniſts nearer to the truth than the Unitarians, becauſe they are more ſucceſsful in making proſelytes? But the Moravians have been more ſucceſsful than the Calviniſts; the Jeſuits, than the Moravians, and the Mahometans, than all. Is therefore the doctrine of Mahomet a revelation from heaven? The ſucceſs of Jeſus, who was alſo a "moral "teacher of chriſtianity" during his perſonal miniſtry, was very inconſiderable: while the phariſees, who compaſſed ſea and land to make a proſelyte, had thouſands of devotees, eſpecially among the inferior orders, who "daily thanked God that they were not as "other

" other men are," and who would hold no communion with Jeſus and his diſciples, but regarded them with abhorrence and contempt, as violators of the ſabbath, tranſgreſſors of the law, and friends of publicans and ſinners. Can this fact be denied? But if admitted, what is the concluſion to which the author's principles will lead him from theſe premiſes?

Mr. W. p. 411. expreſſes his apprehenſion that " the extinction of religion among " us would be attended with the loſs of our " church eſtabliſhment," an event in his apprehenſion pregnant with the " moſt fatal con- " ſequences," he hints p. 412. that it would " greatly endanger our civil inſtitutions," and that the want of an eſtabliſhment " would " be in the higheſt degree injurious to the " cauſe of chriſtianity." Upon all theſe points I have the fortune, good or bad, to differ from our well-intentioned author. I can indeed agree with him, that the principles of the liturgy would rapidly decline when " the liturgy itſelf ſhould no longer " remain in uſe." But I am far from thinking that the " extinction of religion," if ſuch

a caſe could be ſuppoſed, would neceſſarily entail the ruin of the eſtabliſhment. Intereſted prieſts, and crafty ſtateſmen, will continue to ſupport a religious eſtabliſhment which anſwers their private and political purpoſes, at the ſame time that they hold its doctrines in contempt. The idolatry of pagan Rome ſubſiſted in ſplendor long after the declaration of one of its moſt enlightened ſtateſmen *, "that he wondered how augur "could meet augur without laughing." And the authority of papal Rome was never more triumphant, than when its ſovereign pontiff †, upon the receipt of an immenſe treaſure, unwarily exclaimed, "how lucra-"tive is this fable of Jeſus Chriſt!" Nor have modern ſtateſmen been deficient in imitating the "wiſdom of the ancients, in confining "philoſophy to themſelves, and in leaving "religion for the groſſer capacities of the "million." The perſecuting adminiſtration, which, ſoon after the commencement of this century, diſgraced the cloſing years of an unhappy devotee, were not ſuſ-

* Cicero. † Leo X.

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pected of being very ſtrongly attached to the doctrines of that church, which from intereſted views, they ſupported by every mode of oppreſsion, ſhort of the faggot and the wheel.

There are, however, many who think that if the church eſtabliſhment ſhould be diſſolved, our civil conſtitution, if adminiſtered with wiſdom and juſtice, would not be in the leaſt endangered. At any rate, whatever becomes of human eſtabliſhments, civil or eccleſiaſtical, the church of Chriſt is founded upon a rock, and will remain firm and unimpaired. And though liturgies and creeds may fall into diſuſe, the doctrine of the ſcriptures will continue as long as thoſe truly "ineſtimable" records of the chriſtian religion ſhall ſubſiſt.

French principles ſeem to haunt Mr. W.'s mind almoſt as much as they did that of Edmund Burke; and p. 419. he repreſents "the prevalence of evangelical chriſtianity" by which he, no doubt, means his own ſyſtem of "peculiar doctrines" as the beſt "antidote for the malignity of their venom,"

and the moſt efficacious means of "reviving "the fainting cauſe of morals." But the only way to oppoſe atheiſm and infidelity with ſucceſs, is by diſcarding all abſurdity and myſticiſm from religion, by ſhewing that genuine chriſtianity maintains nothing inconſiſtent with good ſenſe, that the doctrines it teaches are ſuch as approve themſelves to the moſt enlightened underſtandings, that the practice it enjoins is eminently beneficial to individuals and to ſociety, and that the hopes which it inſpires are in the higheſt degree chearing and conſolatory, and tend in the moſt direct and powerful manner to elevate the character, and to purify the heart.

As a farther recommendation of this "chriſ-"tianity of our better days," as Mr. W. ſtiles it, he adds p. 420. "that the teachers of theſe "doctrines are perhaps without exception "friendly to our eccleſiaſtical and civil eſta-"bliſhments, and conſequently that their "inſtructions and influence tend directly, as "well as indirectly, to the maintenance of the "cauſe of order and good government." If

by this aſſertion be meant no more than that men paid by the ſtate, to teach the religion of the ſtate, are in general the zealous ſupporters of that government, and of that religion which ſupports them, the aſſertion is neither new, nor marvellous. It has been the practice of prieſts of this deſcription, in all ages, countries, and religions. But it is no proof, nor even the ſlighteſt preſumption, that the doctrine ſo ſupported is true. But if Mr. W. wiſhes to inſinuate, that the oppoſers of his unſcriptural doctrines, are not as valuable and peaceable members of the community as thoſe who hold them, the inſinuation is unfounded, and illiberal; highly unbecoming his character as a chriſtian, however it may ſerve his purpoſe as a political partizan.

Amongſt other means of reviving his "chriſtianity of better days," Mr. W. p. 421. preſſes an attention to this ſubject on "the dignitaries of the ſacred order," and expreſſes his approbation of ſome "who "have already ſounded the alarm, juſtly "cenſuring the practice of ſuffering chriſtia-"nity to degenerate to a mere ſyſtem of

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" ethics, and recommending more attention " to the peculiar doctrines of our religion." Here I presume, that he alludes to Bp. Horsley, who suggested this advice to the clergy of the diocese of St. David's. This venerable prelate has his " peculiar doctrines," too, as well as Mr. W. which " whoever does not receive shall without doubt " perish everlastingly?" And it must be highly edifying to an audience of Cambrian peasants to hear " how the Father produced the " Son by contemplating his own perfections;"* and being either unable, or unwilling, to pro-

* " The existence of the Son flows necessarily from " the Divine intellect exerted in itself: from the Father's " contemplation of his own perfections. But as the Fa- " ther ever was, his perfections have ever been, and his " intellect has been ever active. But perfections which " have ever been, the ever active intellect must ever " have contemplated, and the contemplation which hath " ever been, must ever have been accompanied with its " just effect, the personal existence of the Son." This ridiculous jargon, the learned prelate says " seems to be " founded in scripture," and it makes one of the " peculiar doctrines" of his gospel. And a very peculiar doctrine indeed it is; sufficient to overthrow every pretence to divine authority in any book in which it is contained, and in any system in which it is included. See Horsley's Tracts, p. 55.

duce any more Sons in the ſame way, he, together with the Son (for this is the doctrine of the Romiſh church for which this truly catholic Prelate expreſſes the ſtrongeſt predilection †) produced the holy Ghoſt, who pro-

† The Nicene fathers maintained that the Holy Ghoſt proceeded from the Father only: but the divines of the Romiſh communion afterwards diſcovered that the Son was equally concerned with the Father, in the *proceſſion* of the Holy Ghoſt, and notwithſtanding the violent oppoſition of the Greek church, they have foiſted his name into the Nicene Creed, where it maintains its place with the ſame confidence and juſtice, with which the celebrated heavenly witneſſes keep their ſtation, John v. 7. that is, in open defiance of all evidence and decency.

The partiality of this right reverend Prelate to the papal church appears in his circular letter to the clergy of his Welch dioceſe, where ſpeaking of the Romiſh emigrant prieſts, he ſays, "however they may differ from us "in certain points of doctrine, diſcipline, and external "rites, they are nevertheleſs our brethren, members of "Chriſt, children of God, heirs of the promiſes; more "near and dear to us in truth than ſome who, affecting to "be called our proteſtant brethren, have no other title to "the name of proteſtant than a jew or a pagan." And becauſe theſe perſons "profeſſing to receive our Lord as "a teacher" heſitate to admit the biſhop's "peculiar "doctrines" as revealed truths, and are generally advocates for civil and religious liberty, this chriſtian Prelate,

proceeded from them both, as the ſchoolmen aſſure us, not by generation, but by *ſpiration.**

This eminent Divine, who in conſequence of his officious zeal in the cauſe of orthodoxy, and the truly original diſcoveries he has made in the ſcience of theology, has been raiſed from the humble "couch "of archidiaconal preferment," to "exalt "his mitred front in courts and parlia-"ments," is editor of the works of Sir Iſaac Newton. And he appears to be no mean proficient in the "wiſdom of the an-

Prelate, in the true ſpirit of a popiſh inquiſitor, denounces them as "endeavouring to propagate in this country "thoſe treaſonable and atheiſtical notions," which he ſays, "have done ſo much miſchief in France." Thus with ſome men, calumny ſupplies the place of argument.

The frantic zeal of this mitred ſaint againſt his more enlightened, or more ingenuous proteſtant brethren, whom he has in vain endeavoured to convince by argument, reminds me of Garrick's well known epigram upon Quin:

"Thou Great Infallible! forbear to roar:
"Thy bulls and errors are rever'd no more.
"When doctrines meet with general approbation,
"It is not *hereſy*, but *reformation*."

* See DODDRIDGE's Theological Lectures, Prop. 130. §4.

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" cients who confined philoſophy to the " ſchools of the learned, while they kept up " for the million a ſyſtem of religion, *ſuch* " *as it was*, as alone adapted to their groſſer " natures." Amongſt other curious articles, he has diſcovered, in the writings of Tertullian, an eminent chriſtian father of the ſecond century, that the " majority of be- " lievers," in his time, were mere " idiots *." Readers, not ſo perſpicacious as the Biſhop of Rocheſter, have generally conceived the ſenſe of the paſſage to be, that the majority of chriſtians, of that age, being plain unlettered men, zealous for the divine Unity, warmly reſiſted the Trinitarian doctrine, which ſome philoſophic chriſtians were then endeavouring to introduce †. But Tertullian, who wrote in Latin, here uſes a word of Greek extraction, and the learned prelate

* Horſley's Tracts, p. 175.

† Dr. Clarke thus tranſlates this celebrated paſſage in Tertullian. " The *unlearned people*, which are always the " greateſt part of believers, are frightened at the notion " of the œconomy, (i. e. the Trinity) and pretending " that we teach two or three Gods, but that they are " the worſhippers of the one God, they perpetually cry " out, we hold faſt the Monarchy."—Dr. Clarke on the Trinity, p. 217.

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being, as he ſays, " pretty much at home in " the Greek language, ſo as never to have " occaſion to uſe a lexicon," aſſures us, that " the word can mean neither more nor " leſs than idiots." And no doubt by parity of reaſon, the majority of believers are " idiots," to this day, in his Lordſhip's eſtimation. And idiots indeed they muſt be, if they can implicitly admit all the jargon, and abſurdity, which he and others have held forth as " peculiar doctrines" of divine revelation. Thanks be to God, the age of " darkneſs is paſsing away, and the true light now " ſhineth. *"

I am,

Madam, &c.

* 1 John ii. 8.

LETTER

LETTER XIX.

Obſervations on Mr. W.'s Practical Hints to various deſcriptions of perſons.

MADAM,

IN the ſeventh chapter, to which we now proceed, "practical hints are ſuggeſted to "various deſcriptions of perſons," and the ſection with which it opens contains many valuable remarks which do great credit to the piety and benevolence of the author, but which are alſo blended with ſome obſervations liable to juſt animadverſion.

Mr. W. begins, in p. 423. with telling the "bulk of profeſſed chriſtians, that the "difference between them and true be-"lievers is of the moſt ſerious and moment-"ous account, and that their chriſtianity "is no chriſtianity." Now if this charge means no more than that nominal chriſtians are not real chriſtians, the obſervation is true, but too obvious to be introduced with ſo

ſo much parade. But if it be meant that no chriſtianity is genuine which does not include what he calls "the peculiar doc-"trines," we beg leave, for reaſons already largely ſtated, to demur to his authority.

The duty of ſelf-enquiry, which is ſtrongly urged p. 424. is doubtleſs of ſufficient importance to deſerve all our attention, and we are with great propriety warned againſt "our natural proneneſs to think too favour-"ably of ourſelves." But there is no occaſion to have recourſe to the unſcriptural, and unphiloſophical, notion of the "corrup-"tion of human nature," to account for the diſpoſition which generally prevails "to "over-rate our good qualities, and to over-"look or extenuate our defects." A little acquaintance with the theory of human nature, will ſufficiently account for the exiſtence of ſelfiſhneſs, without ſuppoſing it to be innate, or derived by inheritance from our fallen anceſtor.

What is advanced, p. 426. upon "the "ſources of the erroneous eſtimates we "form of our religious and moral cha-"racter," and particularly concerning the danger

danger of miſtaking "outgrowing, or merely "changing our vices for forſaking of all "ſin," is in general highly proper, and deſerving of ſerious attention, as are alſo the remarks, p. 432. upon the ſubject of "un-"charitableneſs and true charity;" and I agree entirely in the obſervation, that it is "no true charity to countenance men in "their vices."

Mr. W. juſtly remonſtrates, p. 436. againſt applying the epithets "innocent and good "hearted," to thoughtleſs and diſſipated young perſons of either ſex. But his arguments would have been equally forcible, if he had not loaded them with the unſcriptural doctrines of original ſin *, and the ſupernatural "operations of divine grace."

* Mr. W. exhorts ſuch perſons "to remember that "they are fallen creatures, *born in ſin*." The only paſſage in the New Teſtament where this phraſe occurs, is John ix. 34. where the phariſees charge the man who was born blind with being "altogether born in ſins," in direct contradiction to our Lord's own declaration, ver. 3. in reply to a queſtion upon the caſe, propoſed by his diſciples, "Neither did this man ſin, nor his pa-"rents." It is plain, therefore, that a phariſaic tradition is here inculcated by our author as an evangelical truth, and that, in oppoſition to the authority of Chriſt.

If, however, any perſons are "decent, ſober, "uſeful, reſpectable members of the com- "munity, and amiable in the relations of "domeſtic life," p. 408. it does not become us to pronounce, that they are not true chriſtians. As to the phraſes, "born "again," "putting off the old man," and the like, they refer wholly, as we have often obſerved, to the converſion of bigoted jews, or of idolatrous heathen, to the faith of Chriſt, and are never uſed to deſcribe any moral proceſs in the minds of thoſe who have been educated in chriſtian principles. It muſt however be conceded, that mere decency of behaviour without piety, benevolence, and ſelf-government, is not ſufficient to conſtitute genuine chriſtianity.

The advice, p. 441. to thoſe who wiſh to become true chriſtians, contains much that is valuable; but, I am ſorry to ſay, ſtill more, that is injudicious, exceptionable, and unſcriptural. Let ſuch perſons meditate, let them pray, let them examine themſelves, let them reſolve, let them watch, let them ceaſe to do evil, and learn to do right; let them dedicate all their faculties

and

and powers to the ſervice of God. All this is well. But, why muſt they aſcribe their reformation to ſupernatural "workings of "the divine ſpirit?" What is the meaning of praying to God "for Chriſt's ſake, and "in reliance on his mediation," and where is the warrant for ſo doing? Where do the ſcriptures teach them to "labour to be-"come deeply impreſſed with a ſenſe of "their own radical blindneſs and corrup-"tion?" and that above all, they are "to "contemplate that ſtupendous truth, the "incarnation and crucifixion of the ſon of "God? or to eſtimate the guilt of ſin by "the coſtly ſatisfaction which was re-"quired to atone for it?" All theſe imaginary conſiderations which have no foundation in reaſon, or in ſcripture, tend to bewilder the underſtanding, to check the progreſs of rational and manly piety and virtue, and to introduce a ſyſtem of fantaſtic feelings, which have no foundation in the truth of facts, and which contribute nothing to virtuous practice.

Very wiſe and proper, in my opinion, are the repeated cautions ſuggeſted, p. 444. not to over-rate "human eſtimation." But

to a perſon who habitually regards himſelf as acting under the eye of God, the additional motive, of an imaginary "aſſemblage "of inviſible ſpectators," is totally unneceſſary. It is like bringing in human creeds, to improve the goſpel doctrine; human eſtabliſhments, to ſupport the church of Chriſt; and the ſatisfaction of a mediator, to appeaſe the anger of God.

As Mr. W. never defines humility, it is difficult to know in what ſenſe he uſes the word. If it means a juſt view of a man's own imperfections, it cannot appear to any perſon "a paradox, that in proportion as "the chriſtian grows in grace, he grows "alſo in humility," p. 446. For this is no more than ſaying, that in proportion as men advance in virtue, they advance in ſelf-knowledge, and become more ſenſible of their frailties and imperfections. But I cannot help ſuſpecting, that the humility upon which ſome perſons value themſelves, is nothing more, than a perſwaſion that in common with the reſt of mankind, they are "by nature radically tainted with ſin," while at the ſame time they preſume, that them-

themſelves, with a few others, have been arbitrary ſelected from the general maſs, to be regenerated and ſaved. But if this be their humility, it is, I fear, too nearly akin to pride, and naturally tends to generate a high conceit of themſelves in thoſe who are, or, who imagine themſelves to be, the choſen favourites of heaven.

The bulk of nominal chriſtians are ſaid, p. 449, to "know nothing of chriſtianity "but as a ſyſtem of reſtraints," and their notion of chriſtian practice is ſtigmatized, "as ſervile, baſe, and mercenary." But as virtuous habits are to be attained, not by ſupernatural influence, but by a ſlow and gradual, and ſometimes a difficult and painful proceſs, I cannot think ſo hardly of thoſe who, from a ſenſe of duty, deny themſelves unlawful gratifications to which they are inclined, though they fall ſhort of thoſe exalted characters, whoſe eſtabliſhed habits of virtue render them ſuperior to temptation. In one, I ſee the commencement, in the other, the maturity of a virtuous courſe; and the firſt dawnings of reformation are not to be deſpiſed, be-

cauſe they do not, at once, burſt forth into the ſplendor, or attain the ſteadineſs of the perfect day.

I wonder not at the pains which Mr. W. takes, p. 452. to repel "an objection com-"mon, as he ſays, in the mouths of "nominal chriſtians, that his religion wears "a gloomy and forbidding aſpect." And all that he ſo eloquently urges in defence of his own ſyſtem of chriſtianity, is certainly true of the genuine religion of the goſpel. Happineſs is the ultimate end of all the requiſitions and the reſtraints of virtue, nor is any gratification prohibited, but what is inconſiſtent with a ſuperior, and more permanent good. And I doubt not that many well meaning perſons, even upon Mr. W.'s principles, have enjoyed much conſcious ſatisfaction, and delight. But whatever may be ſaid to the contrary, it is not poſsible that ſuch a ſyſtem ſhould not be occaſionally productive of many very painful ſenſations in a benevolent and reflecting mind, becauſe it repreſents the God and Father of the univerſe, as a Tyrant. And though the introduction of a ſecond God, whoſe attribute is perfect

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benevolence, may relieve the imagination, and, as appears in the work before us, and in others of the ſame ſtamp, may chiefly occupy the thoughts and affections of chriſtians of this perſwaſion, and may even ſet a believer at reſt, with reſpect to his own perſonal ſafety; yet this ſecond Being, does not operate as ſo complete a negative upon the character of the firſt, but that a ſerious and benevolent mind will, at times, be greatly ſhocked to think of the maſs of mankind as doomed to eternal miſery, becauſe of that natural depravity which they could not help, and which He who made them, gave, and would not heal; and the contemplation of ſuch a Being, muſt often fill the mind with anxious miſgivings, and with ſecret terrors. Theſe however are alleviated in ſome degree, by entertaining good hopes concerning their own ſtate, by thinking as little as poſsible upon God, and by dwelling continually, as it is known that perſons who hold theſe principles do, upon the *excellencies and graces* of that imaginary ſecond perſon, who ſaves them from the "*fury*" of the firſt.

This, in the language of Mr. W. p. 456. is placing a "firm confidence in the unceasing care and kindness of a gracious "Saviour;" and, p. 459. "relying upon "the assured mercy of the Redeemer." But it is, in truth, as I have before observed, a species of christian idolatry, from which the christian law requires that we should, with the utmost caution, abstain.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XX.

Mr. Wilberforce's Advice to Believers and to Sceptics.

MADAM,

MR. Wilberforce has claſſed in the ſame ſection, his Advice to Sceptics, and to Unitarians. I will take the liberty to correct his diſtribution, and in this letter I will take into conſideration the advice he addreſſes "to "ſome who profeſs their full aſſent to the "fundamental doctrines of the goſpel;" that is, whoſe opinions coincide with his own, and that which he addreſſes to "ſceptics;" or, in plain language, to thoſe who believe too much, and to thoſe who believe too little.

His advice to believers is contained in his ſecond ſection, p. 461. And "he warns "theſe men, firſt, p. 464. to beware leſt "they be nominal chriſtians of another "ſort." It is not eaſy to underſtand this diſtinction between different ſorts of nominal chriſtians. I am unwilling to believe, what never-

nevertheleſs the author's language ſeems to imply, that in Mr. W.'s opinion, the firſt, and moſt fundamental error, is a miſapprehenſion of chriſtian doctrine, and that the next, and more venial one, is a defect in chriſtian practice. His words are theſe, p. 461. "In a former chapter we largely "inſiſted on what may be termed the "fundamental practical error of the bulk "of profeſſed chriſtians in our days; their "either overlooking, or *miſconceiving*, the "peculiar method which the goſpel has "provided for the renovation of our cor-"rupted nature, and for the attainment of "every chriſtian grace." Here then we find that "*miſconception* of the goſpel method," is repreſented as the fundamental error of modern nominal chriſtians.

He adds, that "while we attend in the "*firſt* place to this, we muſt at the ſame "time guard againſt a practical miſtake of "*another* kind. There are not a few who "ſatisfy themſelves with what may be "termed general chriſtianity. Who feel "general penitence and humiliation, but "who neglect that vigilant and jealous care

"with

" with which they ſhould labour to extir-
" pate every particular corruption," &c.

I do not then miſrepreſent our author, when I ſtate him as teaching that miſ-conception of chriſtian doctrine is the "fundamental practical error" of the preſent day; and I have miſtaken the whole tenor of his book, if he does not mean to repreſent this fundamental error, as inconſiſtent with the ſalvation of thoſe who hold it. It is indeed difficult to believe, that in this enlightened and inquiſitive age, a man of Mr. W.'s rank, talents, and character, can doom to deſtruction all thoſe wiſe and good men, who have doubted, or rejected, his ſtrange unſcriptural doctrines. If this be the religion the pleaſures of which he enjoys with ſo high a reliſh, I, for one, do not " envy him his feelings." As to the reſt, what he advances in this ſection, allowance being made for his aſſumed principles, is very juſt. The chriſtian religion requires the abſolute renunciation of every vice, and the practice of every virtue. It is the indiſpenſible duty of all to exerciſe the greateſt vigilance, and to ſet a ſpecial guard

guard againſt thoſe vices, to which, in their reſpective circumſtances, they are peculiarly expoſed.

Mr. W. now proceeds to "addreſs ſome "brief obſervations to ſceptics," p. 467, and what he advances upon this head, appears to me, in the main, juſt, and deſerving of very ſerious attention. It is a fair queſtion which Mr. W. propoſes to unbelievers, "whether if chriſtianity be not "in their eſtimation true, there is not at "leaſt a preſumption in its favour, ſufficient "to entitle it to a ſerious examination; from "its having been embraced, upon full en"quiry, by Bacon, and Milton, and Locke, "and Newton." And again, p. 468. "Can "the ſceptic in general ſay with truth, that "he has either proſecuted an examination "into the evidences of revelation at all, or "at leaſt with a ſerioufneſs and diligence "in any degree proportioned to the im"portance of the ſubject?"

I will beg leave, by the way, to obſerve, that neither Locke nor Newton, who are here ſo deſervedly celebrated for their rational and firm attachment to the chriſtian

tian religion, were believers in, what are ſtiled throughout the Practical View, "the "peculiar doctrines of the goſpel." There is great reaſon to believe, that Sir Iſaac Newton was a proper Unitarian *, as it is certain that his friend Hopton Haynes alſo was. As to Mr. Locke, he was the father of rational criticiſm. It is he, who by introducing the wiſe and happy method of making the ſcriptures their own interpreters, has taught us the true meaning of thoſe figurative expreſsions, upon which the men who only derive their knowledge of chriſtianity, from catechiſms and creeds, build their crude and unſcriptural ſyſtems. Mr. Locke was a man of extraordinary genius and talents, great in the departments of metaphyſical, moral, and political philoſophy, but greateſt of all, in the interpretation of the ſcriptures, to which he devoted the latter part of his life. I will venture to ſay, that

* Mr. Haynes aſſured a friend, "that Sir Iſaac New-"ton did not believe our Lord's pre-exiſtence: and that "he much lamented Dr. Clarke's embracing Arianiſm, "which opinion he feared had been, and ſtill would be, "if maintained by learned men, a great obſtruction to "the progreſs of chriſtianity."—HAYNES on the Attributes of God. Preface, p. 21.

no perſon will ever underſtand the epiſtolary parts of the New Teſtament, who does not read them in the method which Mr. Locke recommends in the introduction to his own excellent commentary on the epiſtles. But this requires a degree of attention and mental exertion, which few are able, and fewer ſtill are willing, to apply. It is much eaſier to quote texts as apophthegms, in the ſenſe impoſed upon them by creeds and homilies, than to reflect, compare, and inveſtigate for ourſelves. Mr. W. profeſſes, and no doubt ſincerely, to value the ſcriptures highly; and I am perſwaded, that if he would teſtify his regard by ſtudying them in Mr. Locke's method, he might, even yet, be gradually introduced into their true ſenſe and meaning. But with him it would be a work of time, labour, and ſelf-denial; for the cloud of prejudice which hangs over his mind, would, with great difficulty, be diſpelled. I do not mean to ſay that all Mr. Locke's interpretations are juſt; but he has ſupplied us with the true key to ſcripture criticiſm, which thoſe who ſucceed him, aſsiſted by his previous labours, may uſe to more advantage than he himſelf has done. Of this we have a remarkable inſtance,

ſtance, in Dr. Taylor's judicious commentary on the epiſtle to the Romans, and the admirable Key which he has perfixed to it; in which he explains, and amply confirms, the principles of interpretation before advanced by Mr. Locke. And the ſucceſſors of Dr. Taylor, treading in the ſame ſteps, and taking advantage of his improvements, may advance ſtill farther in the ſame road. In compariſon with ſuch truly profound and inſtructive works, how ſuperficial, and trifling, are ſome popular expoſitions in which, through the force of prejudice, ignorance of the juſt principles of ſcripture criticiſm, or a deſire to pleaſe the multitude, the text is every where ſtrained to the popular ſenſe, and the apoſtles are made to write, as though they had been diſciples of the Weſtminſter Aſſembly of Divines.

Infidelity is repreſented, p. 468. "as the "production of a careleſs and irreligious "life, operating together with prejudices "and erroneous conceptions, concerning "the nature of the leading doctrines, and "fundamental tenets of chriſtianity." And its progreſs is pretty accurately traced in

"the

" the caſe of young men of condition, bred " up among nominal chriſtians." Mr. W. p. 479. denies " that the increaſe of in- " fidelity in our own days, is in conſe- " quence of the reaſonings of the infidel " writers having been much ſtudied, but " from the progreſs of luxury, and the " decay of morals; and ſo far as this in- " creaſe may be traced at all to the works " of ſceptical writers, it has been produced " not by argument and diſcuſsion, but by " ſarcaſms, and points of wit, which have " operated on weak minds." And he aſſerts, with a confidence not ſufficiently founded on fact, that " the literary op- " poſers of chriſtianity, from Herbert to " Hume, have been ſeldom read." He adds, " Their very names would be ſcarcely " found, if Leland had not preſerved them " from oblivion." I ſuſpect that the worthy author is in this inſtance under a miſtake, and that the ſubtle and plauſible objections of Bolingbroke, and Hume, are more read, even at preſent, than the ſenſible and ſolid, but dull and verboſe replies of Leland.

I ſhall

I ſhall conclude this letter with ſtating, briefly, what appear to me ſome of the principal cauſes of modern infidelity. 1. The firſt and chief, is an unwillingneſs to ſubmit to the reſtraints of religion, and the dread of a future life, which leads men to overlook evidence, and to magnify objections. 2. The palpable abſurdities of creeds generally profeſſed by chriſtians, which men of ſenſe having confounded with the genuine doctrines of revelation, they have rejected the whole at once, and without enquiry. 3. Impatience, and unwillingneſs to perſevere in the laborious taſk of weighing arguments, and examining objections. 4. Faſhion has biaſſed the minds of ſome young perſons of virtuous characters, and competent knowledge, to reject revelation, in order to avoid the imputation of ſingularity, and to eſcape the ridicule of thoſe with whom they deſire to aſſociate. 5. Pride, that they might at an eaſy rate attain the character of philoſophers, and of ſuperiority to vulgar prejudice. 6. Dwelling upon difficulties only, from which the moſt rational ſyſtem is not

exempt, and by which the moſt candid, inquiſitive, and virtuous minds are ſometimes entangled.

The maſs of mankind who never think at all, but who admit without heſitation "all that the nurſe and that the prieſt have "taught," can never become ſceptics. Of courſe, the whole claſs of unbelievers, conſiſts of perſons who have thought, more or leſs, upon the ſubject; and as perſons of ſenſe ſeldom diſcard at once all the principles in which they have been educated, it is not wonderful that many who begin with the higheſt orthodoxy, paſs through different ſtages of their creed, dropping an article or two in every ſtep of their progreſs, till at length, weary of their labour, and not knowing where to fix, they reject it altogether. This, to a ſuperficial and timid obſerver, appears to be an objection to freedom of enquiry, for no perſon beginning to enquire, can, or ought to ſay, where he will ſtop. But the ſincere friend to truth will not be diſcouraged. For without enquiry truth cannot be aſcertained, and if the chriſtian religion ſhrinks from cloſe examination

in this bold and inquiſitive age, it muſt, and it ought to fall. But of this iſſue, I have not the ſmalleſt apprehenſion. Genuine chriſtianity can well bear the fiery trial through which it is now paſsing, and while the droſs and the rubbiſh are conſumed, the pure gold will remain uninjured, and will come forth from the furnace with increaſed luſtre.

I am,

Madam, &c.

LETTER XXI.

Animadverſions upon Mr. Wilberforce's account of the Unitarians.—Concluſion.

MADAM,

THE proſpect of reſt after the toil of a journey, is not more pleaſant to the weary traveller, than to me, and probably to my readers, is the near approach of the concluſion of my taſk. I aſk indulgence therefore but for one epiſtle more, and then, "when I have completed my ſtrain, I will "return to obſcurity *."

Mr. W. proceeds, p. 476. to animadvert upon the Unitarians; and firſt, he apologizes to his orthodox reader, p. 475. for "conceding the term to the claſs of per-"ſons" who maintain the proper humanity of Chriſt. Mere words are never worth a diſpute; and if the worſhippers of three, or of three hundred, equal, infinite ſpirits, chuſe to call themſelves Unitarians, they have

* Explebo numerum, reddarque tenebris.

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my free conſent, provided they allow me to uſe the word in what appears to me to be its proper ſenſe, and to apply it to that deſcription of perſons, to whom alone, in my judgment, it belongs. A *Unitarian, according to the idea which I annex to the term, is one, who does not aſcribe to any derived Being, the attributes, works, or honours, which reaſon and revelation appropriate to God.* He therefore is not a Unitarian, in the proper ſenſe of the word, who either receives Jeſus as truly God; or who in words denying his divinity, regards him as the delegate of the Father, in the formation and adminiſtration of the world; or laſtly, who offers any kind of religious addreſſes to him. The doctrine of the Divine Unity is indeed ſo clearly revealed both in the jewiſh and the chriſtian ſcriptures, that all chriſtians profeſs to believe it in ſome ſenſe, though the majority hold principles totally repugnant to it.

Mr. W. in the plenitude of his chriſtian charity, obſerves, p. 474. "that the account which has been given of the ſecret "but grand ſource of infidelity, may perhaps juſtly be extended, as being not ſel-

" dom true in the caſe of thoſe who deny " the fundamental doctrines of the goſpel," in other words, his own peculiar opinions. Now the account given of the ſource of infidelity, p. 472. is this: " It appears plainly " that infidelity is generally the offspring " of prejudice, and that its ſucceſs is mainly " to be aſcribed to the depravity of the " moral character." Such it ſeems in Mr. W.'s eſtimation, is the true account of the general ſucceſs of that doctrine, which was embraced by Newton, Lardner, and Jebb, and by many others, of the moſt ſplendid talents, and unſpotted characters, who have devoted their time to the ſtudy of the ſcriptures, and who are greatly his ſuperiors, in every branch of ſacred literature. " This ſucceſs " is mainly to be aſcribed to the depravity " of the moral character." Surely, this gentleman will, upon reflection, for his own credit, retract his harſh and unjuſt cenſure, which breathes a ſpirit ſo inconſiſtent with that humility and candour which he every where profeſſes. What right can Mr. W. have to invade the province of the Omnipotent Judge, and to arraign his

his fellow-ſervants, and fellow-chriſtians, of "moral depravity," becauſe they ſtrictly adhere to, what they believe to be, the genuine doctrine of their common Maſter, and reſolutely reject all opinions which in their judgment are unauthorized, and untrue, by whatever epithets they may be dignified, or by whomſoever they may be embraced, defended, or impoſed.

In the ſame charitable ſpirit, Unitarianiſm is repreſented, p. 475. "as a ſort of half-"way houſe, between orthodoxy and infi-"delity." And truly, whatever might be the intention of our zealous author, I, for one, am far from being offended with the quarters he has aſsigned us; regarding them as a proper medium between ineligible extremes. Nor am I aſhamed even to avow, that of the two, I would rather approach the confines of cold and cheerleſs ſcepticiſm, than the burning zone of mercileſs orthodoxy. For, upon the principles of infidelity, at the very worſt, all events take place at random, and my chance is as good as that of another man. But if Mr. W.'s ſyſtem be true, the univerſe is under the government of OMNI-

POTENT MALIGNITY, than which no conſideration can be more painful and alarming.

At this half-way houſe, we are told, that a perſon travelling "from orthodoxy to in-"fidelity, ſometimes indeed finally ſtops, but "not unfrequently, he only pauſes there for "a while, and then purſues his progreſs." Now, having myſelf been a reſident in it for ſome years, I may be ſuppoſed to know a little more about it than Mr. W. who ſeems to be as much afraid of it, as a child is of a haunted caſtle. And I can from experience aſſure that gentleman, that it is a very ſafe, pleaſant, and commodious dwelling, in which, if he would venture to take up his abode, he would not be diſpleaſed either with his entertainment, or his company. To enjoy the ſituation however to the greateſt advantage, he muſt ceaſe to look at objects through the falſe medium of a fervid imagination, and muſt view them in the ſober light of reaſon and truth. "When "he becomes a man, he muſt put away "childiſh things." He will indeed loſe ſome of his preſent viſionary raptures, but the want

want of theſe will be abundantly compenſated, by the enlargement and ſimplicity of his views, by the increaſed ſtrength and comprehenſion of his mind, and by the proper direction of his religious affections.

Our author is miſtaken in repreſenting the majority of thoſe who enter this manſion as only ſojourners, "pauſing for a while, "and then purſuing their progreſs to in-"fidelity." Some, it muſt be confeſſed, of whom we once entertained better hopes, have deſerted our ſociety. We formed, alas, an erroneous judgment of their characters. "They went out from us becauſe they were "not of us; if they had been of us, they "would no doubt have continued with "us*." They either did not underſtand their principles; or they were perplexed with difficulties which perhaps patience and attention might have ſolved: or they did not ſufficiently feel the practical energy of chriſtian truth; or they might poſſibly be too much influenced by love of the world, to advancement in which, the profeſſion of unpopular truth is no ſmall ob-

* 1 John xi. 19.

ſtruc-

ſtruction: But it is not our province to judge. They have a Maſter to whom they are accountable; and by his deciſion they muſt abide. May that ſentence be favourable!—In the mean time, Mr. W. may be aſſured, that the number who have left us are few in compariſon with thoſe who remain, or who are daily joining themſelves to our ſociety. And though the believers in certain "peculiar doctrines" may think us extravagant in our expectations, I can aſſure them that we do not deſpair of the advent of a glorious period, in the revolution of ages, when the Unitarian Church ſhall comprehend in its ample incloſure, the whole chriſtianized world.

Mr. W. does the Unitarians the juſtice to acknowledge, p. 475. "that their teachers "by no means profeſs to abſolve their "followers from the unbending ſtrictneſs "of chriſtian morality. They preſcribe "the predominant love of God, and an "habitual ſpirit of devotion." Leſt however they ſhould be exalted above meaſure by this liberal conceſſion, he adds, "But "it is an unqueſtionable fact, a fact which "they

" they themſelves *almoſt* admit, that this " claſs of religioniſts," as he is pleaſed to ſtile them, " is not in general diſtinguiſhed " for ſuperior purity of life; and ſtill leſs " for that frame of mind, which by the in- " junction to be ſpiritually, not carnally " minded, the word of God preſcribes to " us, as one of the ſureſt teſts of our " experiencing the vital power of chriſ- " tianity."

Such is the very candid judgment which Mr. W. forms of the moral and religious character of the Unitarians. How nearly reſembling the temper of the Phariſee in the parable: " God I thank thee, that I am not " as other men are, nor even as this pub- " lican." How cloſely bordering upon that ſupercilious ſpirit which our Lord re- proves in the jews, who concluded, be- cauſe " the Son of Man came eating and " drinking," and affecting no habits of auſte- rity, or unneceſſary ſingularity, that he muſt therefore " be the friend, and aſſociate, " of publicans and ſinners." But, be it known Mr. W. and to all who, like him, are diſ-

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poſed to condemn their brethren unheard, that if the Unitarians were inclined to boaſt in the characters of thoſe who have profeſſed their principles, "they have whereof "to glory," and that they could bring forward names of allowed and tranſcendant excellence, to whoſe diſtinguiſhed merits, their enemies themſelves have been compelled, to bear their unwilling teſtimony. And if they took pleaſure in expoſing the faults of their more orthodox brethren, they likewiſe have tales to unfold, which would reflect little credit, either on the parties, or on their principles. But of ſuch mutual reproaches there would be no end, nor can any advantage accrue from them to any cauſe. And I hope, that the only reply which chriſtians who think with me, will ever vouchſafe to charges of this kind, is by the ſilent eloquence, and powerful argument of a virtuous and uſeful life.

In the ſame ſpirit of charity, the author proceeds to remark, p. 476. that "in point "of fact, Unitarianiſm ſeems to be reſorted "to, not merely by thoſe who are diſguſted "with

" with the "*peculiar doctrines*" of chriſti-
" anity (that is, Mr. W.'s opinions) but
" by thoſe alſo who are ſeeking a refuge
" from the ſtrictneſs of her practical pre-
" cepts: and who more particularly would
" eſcape from the obligation which ſhe
" impoſes on her adherents, rather to
" incur the dreaded charge of ſingularity,
" than fall in with the declining manners
" of a diſſipated age." Upon this aſſer-
tion I ſhall only obſerve, that for a perſon
to profeſs the obnoxious principles of Uni-
tarianiſm in order to avoid the imputation
of ſingularity, is ſomething like a man's
throwing himſelf into the ſea to avoid
being drowned. It would be an act of pure
inſanity *.

Mr. W. p. 476. attempts to account for
the admiſsion of " Unitarianiſm, where it
" may be ſuppoſed to proceed from the
" underſtanding, rather than from the
" heart," but wiſely declines " entering into

* Numerous and increaſing as the Unitarians certainly are, their number is ſtill very ſmall in proportion to that of the advocates for the popular ſyſtem, and the obloquy to which they are expoſed is notorious.

" a con-

"a controverſy," upon which he decides ſo peremptorily, and of which he knows ſo little. Since however he has thought proper to aſsign principles and motives to the Unitarians, ſo widely different from the real grounds of their faith and practice, I will take the liberty in a few words to ſet him right.

The Unitarians believe upon grounds common to all chriſtians, that Jeſus of Nazareth was a divinely commiſsioned teacher of truth and righteouſneſs, and that having been publicly crucified by his enemies, he was raiſed from the dead on the third day. They regard it as an indiſpenſible duty to believe, whatever he was commiſsioned to teach. And particularly, upon the evidence of his doctrine and reſurrection, they expect a general reſurrection of the dead, "both of the juſt, "and of the unjuſt;" and a ſubſequent ſtate of retribution, in which all ſhall be treated in exact correſpondence with their moral characters.

That Unitarians believe Jeſus to have been a man, for the ſame reaſons for which they

they believe the proper humanity of Peter and Paul, of Moſes and Abraham. He appeared as a man, he called himſelf a man, he was believed by all his companions and contemporaries to be a man, he had all the accidents of a man; he was born, he lived, he eat and drank, and ſlept; he converſed, he rejoiced, he wept, he ſuffered, and he died as other men.

That he was nothing more than a man, poſſeſſed of extraordinary powers, and inveſted with an extraordinary divine commiſsion, and that he had no exiſtence previous to his birth, they believe, ſimply upon this ground, that there is no evidence to prove the contrary. It is not incumbent upon them, nor do they pretend, to produce proof, that a perſon who appeared as a man, was really ſuch. If any maintain, that Jeſus of Nazareth was ſomething more than a human being, whether an angelic, ſuper-angelic, or divine perſon, it is their buſineſs to prove their aſſertion.

Evidence, ſuch as it is, has been produced. And it conſiſts of certain texts of ſcrip-

ſcripture, chiefly taken from the New Teſtament, which are thought to teach, or to imply, the doctrine *. Now, the Unitarians pledge themſelves to ſhew that all theſe paſſages are either interpolated, corrupted, or miſunderſtood. This they do by critical enquiries, either into the authenticity of the text, or into its proper meaning in the

* A perſon who has not paid particular attention to the ſubject, would be ſurprized to find how very few texts there are, which even *ſeem*, directly to aſſert the pre-exiſtence of Chriſt. If any one is deſirous to learn the true doctrine of the New Teſtament upon this ſubject, let him collect the texts that are thought directly or indirectly to ſupport it, and likewiſe thoſe in which the titles, attributes, works, and honours of Deity, are thought to be aſcribed to Chriſt, and comparing the explanations given of theſe texts, by the writers for, and againſt, the pre-exiſtence and deity of Chriſt, a ſerious and unprejudiced enquirer will ſoon diſcover on which ſide the weight of argument lies. This is the true way of aſcertaining the point in queſtion. But it requires time, labour, patience, and candour. It is a much ſhorter and eaſier courſe, to ſay at once of a doctrine "that it is the offspring of prejudice, and that "its ſucceſs is mainly to be aſcribed to the depravity of "the moral character."

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connexion in which it ſtands*. Unitarians therefore are univerſally friends to a careful, diligent, and critical ſtudy of the ſcriptures.

Here the argument reſts. No ſatisfactory evidence having been produced of the pre-exiſtence and deity of Jeſus of Nazareth, the doctrine, of courſe, falls to the ground: and with it all thoſe anti-chriſtian opinions which are blended with it, or flow from it. To maintain, that a more ſplendid and coſtly ſcheme of redemption would have been more efficacious, and more worthy of God, is highly indecent. It is arraigning infinite Wiſdom at the tribunal of human Folly. The fact is, that God has actually "ſent "the man Chriſt Jeſus to ſave us from our "iniquities:" and we are ſure that this method of ſalvation is the beſt, becauſe God hath choſen it.

This ſhort abſtract of Unitarian principles, will enable us to judge of the value of an ar-

* See the Commentary of Grotius, Dr. Lardner's letter on the Logos, Mr. Lindſey's Apology for reſigning the vicarage of Catterick, and the Sequel to that Apology; alſo, Hopton Haynes on the Attributes of God. For the doctrine of the primitive Church concerning the perſon of Chriſt, ſee Dr. Prieſtley's Hiſtory of Early Opinions.

gument, propoſed in a work entitled, Calviniſm and Socinianiſm Compared, upon which Mr. W. p. 476. paſſes a very high encomium, and the amount of which is, "We Calviniſts, being much better chriſtians "than you Socinians, our doctrine muſt of "courſe be true."

To this "maſterly defence of the doc-"trines of chriſtianity, and acute refutation "of the oppoſite errors," Mr. W. and his friends are highly welcome. The Unitarians will not treſpaſs upon the holy ground. We have learned that "not he who com-"mendeth himſelf is approved, but whom "the Lord commendeth *:" And ſatisfied with this, we wait with chearful confidence the deciſion of that day "which ſhall try "every man's work." In the mean time we reſt our cauſe upon the ſcriptures critically examined, and judiciouſly explained. This way of reaſoning is branded in the ſame "maſterly performance †," as "mangling "and altering the tranſlation to our own "minds:" which brings to my recollection the honeſt quaker's exclamation, "O argu-

* 2 Cor. x. 18.

† Calviniſm and Socinianiſm Compared, p. 252.

" ment! O argument! the Lord rebuke " thee." From the rash censures of petulant ignorance, we appeal to the deliberate judgment of men of enlightened minds, and sound learning; who testify their regard to the scriptures, not by empty professions, nor by blind submission to vulgar interpretations, but by making them the subject of candid, serious, and impartial investigation; and in such a court, we expect with confidence, a favourable verdict.

I have now, Madam, finished the strictures which at your request I drew up, upon " Mr. W.'s Practical View of the prevail- " ing religious system of professed chris- " ians:" and which, though originally intended for your private use, I have consented, with your permission, and at the desire of some candid and judicious friends, to submit to the public eye. My intention in writing, has not been to depreciate Mr. W.'s character, for I think well both of his understanding, and of his heart; and the goodness of his intentions in the publication before us, cannot be too highly applauded. Least of

all, has it been my wiſh, to diſparage genuine and practical chriſtianity. My deſign has been, to ſhew that the worthy writer is totally miſtaken in the means, by which he would accompliſh his benevolent purpoſe, of making men wiſer, and better; and that the opinions which he repreſents as the "grand peculiarities" of chriſtianity, are erroneous in the extreme; and deſtitute of all ſupport from the ſcriptures; that they calumniate human nature, and derogate exceedingly both from the moral character, and from the abſolute ſupremacy, of God; that they magnify poſitive rites to a degree, which muſt neceſſarily diminiſh the attention to moral duties; alſo, that they tend to contract the mind, and to fill it with viſionary ſpeculations, with gloomy apprehenſions, and, too often, with malignant paſsions, the reverſe of the liberal and chearful ſpirit of genuine chriſtianity. Upon theſe ſubjects, I hope that I have expreſſed myſelf in a manner becoming a candid and ſerious advocate for truth, without bitterneſs, or undue warmth. I truſt alſo, that what has been advanced, can-

not eaſily be *miſunderſtood*; though I do not flatter myſelf, that it will not be *miſ-repreſented*. How far I may have ſucceeded in my profeſſed deſign, muſt be left to your ſuperior diſcernment, and to the judgement of an impartial Public.

I have the honour to be,

Madam,

Your moſt obedient ſervant,

THOMAS BELSHAM.

Hackney, Feb. 14, 1798.

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